THE SAGA AND THE MYTH OF

SIR THOMAS MORE

R. W. Chambers

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LITERARY HISTORY LECTURE

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By Professor R. W. CHAMBERS
FELLOW OF THE ACADEMY

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THE SAGA

There is seldom much good, as W. P. Ker once said, in a lecturer beginning by protesting his unworthiness; yet I have reasons for more than usual diffidence; it may be objected that I am leaving the field of English philology and literature, to make a raid into the territory of the historians.

And I admit that, according to the bounds drawn by the best authorities, I am trespassing. We have four biographies of More written in Tudor times, and a fifth from early Stuart days. But the surveys of English literature take no notice of this sudden outburst of biographical writing, quite without precedent in English. It seems to be authoritatively held that these lives are not literature.

Yet surely these lives *are* our concern, if we are concerned with the development of English thought. What I shall try to argue is that Sir Thomas More fills an essential place in that development, linking our medieval with our modern writers; and that these contemporary lives are essential, if we are to understand Sir Thomas More. Unless we study the Saga of Sir Thomas More, we shall be in danger of believing the Myth.

But, before coming to that, my main theme, may I say that, also from the standpoint of literary technique, these lives should not be neglected. Literature cannot be studied in isolated sections: if we are to follow the development of the drama, or of the novel, we cannot limit ourselves to drama or novel: we cannot neglect, for example, biographies and memoirs. More's controversial theological works contain pages which might belong to a novel, and the *Lives* often anticipate the dramatic writing of the end of the reign of Elizabeth. The suddenness of that Elizabethan outburst of dramatic writing arouses our wonder; we seem to pass 'in a space of time almost unparalleled for brevity'[1] from rhymed doggerel to the realism of Shakespeare.

[1] Symonds, *Shakspere's Predecessors* (1884), p. 3.

But our wonder at this suddenness arises in great measure because we have been thinking only of the drama, and neglecting other places where the passion for mimicry is at work.

Take Shakespeare at his liveliest: Mistress Quickly and Doll Tearsheet are in the Boar's Head Tavern. Falstaff enters, and begins to tease poor Doll, till Mistress Quickly intervenes:

> *Mistress Quickly.* By my troth, this is the old fashion; you two never meet but you fall to some discord: you are both, i' good truth, as rheumatic as two dry toasts; you cannot one bear with another's confirmities. What the good year! . . .
> *Doll.* Come, I'll be friends with thee, Jack: thou art going to the wars; and whether I shall ever see thee again or no, there is nobody cares.

Then Ancient Pistol is announced:

> *Doll.* Hang him, swaggering rascal! . . .
> *Mistress Quickly.* Shut the door; there comes no swaggerers here: I have not lived all this while, to have swaggering now: shut the door, I pray you.
> *Falstaff.* Dost thou hear, hostess?
> *Mistress Quickly.* Pray ye, pacify yourself, Sir John: there comes no swaggerers here.
> *Falstaff.* Dost thou hear? it is mine ancient.
> *Mistress Quickly.* Tilly fally, Sir John, ne'er tell me: your ancient swaggerer comes not in my doors. . . .

Yes, it is all very wonderful, when contrasted with the doggerel dialogue in plays of a dozen years before. But we must not shut our eyes to anticipations elsewhere nearly half a century before.

Turn to Roper's *Life of More*. Mistress Alice, More's wife, obtained licence to visit her husband, after he had been some time prisoner in the Tower, and 'bluntly saluted him' thus:

> 'What the good year, Master More,' quoth she, 'I marvel that you, that have been always hitherto taken for so wise a man, will now so play the fool to lie here in this close filthy prison, and be content thus to be shut up amongst mice and rats, when you might be abroad at your liberty, and with the favour and goodwill both of the King and his Council, if you would but do as all the bishops and best learned of this realm have done. And seeing you have at Chelsey a right fair house, your library, your books, your gallery, your garden, your orchard, and all other necessaries so handsome about you, where you might in the company of me your wife, your children, and household, be merry, I muse what a God's name you mean here still thus fondly to tarry.'
>
> After he had a while quietly heard her, with a cheerful countenance he said unto her: 'I pray thee, good Mistress Alice, tell me one thing.'

'What is that?' quoth she.

'Is not this house,' quoth he, 'as nigh heaven as mine own?'

To whom she, after her accustomed homely fashion, not liking such talk, answered 'Tilly vally, Tilly vally.'

'How say you, Mistress Alice,' quoth he, 'is it not so?'

'Bone deus, Bone deus, man, will this gear never be left?' quoth she.

'Well then, Mistress Alice,' quoth he, 'if it be so, it is very well: for I see no great cause why I should much joy, either of my gay house or of anything belonging thereunto, when, if I should but seven years lie buried under the ground, and then arise and come hither again, I should not fail to find some therein that would bid me get out of doors, and tell me it were none of mine. What cause have I then to like such an house, as would so soon forget his master?'

Now, why do surveys of English literature not think dialogue like this worth notice? Probably because it is dismissed as historical, as something which has nothing to do with the literature of the imagination. Yet surely it is highly imaginative. I do not mean that the interview did not take place; Roper's word proves that it did. But, in the days of Henry VIII, the Tower was not furnished with the same 'King's Lugg' which, if we believe *The Fortunes of Nigel*, it possessed in the days of James I. Whatever James might do, Roper could not, by permission of the Lieutenant, lurk unseen to take notes of the interview between Sir Thomas More and his lady. Roper must presumably have depended for his account of that interview upon the very confused narrative which Mistress Alice brought home with her that evening to the sad house at Chelsea. It was perhaps twenty years afterwards that Roper wrote his *Life*. Now, let any one try to put down on paper a conversation reported to him, at second hand, twenty years ago, by a woman too worried and too angry to know what she was saying. Further, it would be a grave injustice to Mistress Alice to suppose the conversation to be verbatim. *She* was not the woman, after so brave an opening, to have tamely allowed her batteries to be silenced. But Roper had lived in the same house as his step-mother-in-law for sixteen years and more. The dialogue has its origin, as Wordsworth held that good imaginative writing should have, in emotion recollected in tranquillity.

Somehow Roper had learnt how to imitate his mother-in-law; I suspect he learnt it from his father-in-law. Anyway, in More's own writings we meet with a certain anonymous lady who is very unmistakably Mistress Alice. For example, when More is writing his devotional works in prison, we have scraps of the conversation of a certain great lady who, of her charity, visits a certain poor prisoner:

> Whom she found in a chamber (to say the truth) meetly fair, and at the leastwise it was strong enough; but with mats of straw the prisoner had made it so warm, both under the foot and round about the walls, that in these things for the keeping of his health, she was on his behalf glad and very well comforted. But among many other displeasures that for his sake she was sorry for, one she lamented much in her mind, that he should have the chamber door upon him by night made fast by the jailer, that should shut him in. 'For by my troth,' quoth she, 'if the door should be shut upon me, I would ween it would stop up my breath.' At that word of hers the prisoner laughed in his mind (but he durst not laugh aloud, nor say nothing to her, for somewhat indeed he stood in awe of her, and had his finding there, much part, of her charity for alms). But he could not but laugh inwardly. Why, he wist well enough, that she used on the inside to shut every night full surely her own chamber to her, both door and windows too, and used not to open them of all the long night.[1]

The prisoner, we may note, had his finding of her charity. In a letter to Cromwell, Mistress Alice tells how she has every week to pay 'fifteen shillings for the board-wages of my poor husband and his servant; for the maintaining whereof I have been compelled, of very necessity, to sell part of mine apparel, for lack of other substance to make money of'.[2]

In earlier and happier days, More tells how a husband tried to instruct his lady in the elements of science, explaining how the earth is the centre of all things, and how the centre of the earth is consequently the lowest spot in creation, from which everything ascends in every direction. (It is the same system, of course, which we have in Dante, where, after passing the haunch of Satan, which is fixed in the exact centre of the earth, the explorer feels that he is no longer moving downwards, but upwards.) Similarly More makes the husband explain how, if a hole were bored through the earth, and a millstone thrown down it, the millstone would fall to the centre, and there would stop; because if it went beyond the centre it would be falling upwards, 'from a lower place to a higher'.

> Now while he was telling her this tale, she nothing went about to consider his words, but as she was wont in all other things, studied all the while nothing else but what she might say to the contrary. And when he had, with much work and oft interrupting, brought at last his tale to an end: 'Well,' quoth she to him, . . . 'I will argue like, and make you a like sample. My maid hath yonder a spinning wheel—or else, because all your reason resteth in the

[1] *Works* (1557), p. 1247.

[2] Howard, L., *Collection of Letters*, i. 272, 1756; compare the copy of the petition from Lady More to the King, MS. *Arundel*, 152, fol. 300 b.

roundness of the world—come hither, thou girl; take out thy spindle and bring me hither the whorl. Lo, sir, ye make imaginations, I cannot tell you what. But here is a whorl, and it is round as the world is. And we shall not need imagine an hole bored through, for it hath an hole bored through indeed. But yet, because ye go by imaginations, I will imagine with you. Imagine me now that this whorl were ten mile thick on every side, and this hole through it still, and so great that a millstone might well go through it. Now, if the whorl stood on the one end, and a millstone were thrown in above at the tother end, would it go no farther than the midst, trow you? By God, if one threw in a stone no bigger than an egg, I ween if ye stood in the nether end of the hole five mile beneath the midst, it would give you a pat upon the pate that it would make you claw your head, and yet should ye feel none itch at all.'[1]

This may remind us not only of the importance of More's writing in the history of English narrative prose, but also of its importance as a source for the Saga.

But this source is more used by the later biographers than by Roper, who finds sufficient materials for his little book in his own knowledge. Yet, intimate as this knowledge was, Roper depicts himself as holding rather aloof, not quite understanding the man whose memory he later grew to revere. Perhaps this is why, although he draws More as without a fault, he never arouses that dislike which we usually cherish towards the faultless. Roper disarms us, by the innocent humility with which he unconsciously shows his own character. Long before the troubles began, Roper congratulated More on England having so catholic a prince as Henry, and subjects all in one faith agreeing together. All this More admitted, yet he foretold evil to come. Roper protested. More stuck to his prophecy, but would not give his reasons (probably he was not free to give his reasons, even to Roper). Roper, not unnaturally, got flurried and annoyed, and at last turned on his father-in-law:

I said, 'By my troth, Sir, it is very desperately spoken.' That vile term, I cry God heartily mercy, did I give him. Who, by these words perceiving me in a fume, said merrily unto me, 'Well, well, Son Roper, it shall not be so, it shall not be so, it shall not be so.' Whom in sixteen years and more, being in his house conversant with him, I could never perceive as much as once in a fume.

Later, Roper is annoyed because More foresees 'the confirmation with oaths', when Roper as yet 'saw no likelihood thereof'. And this slowness to follow More's thought persists to the end. In the boat on the way to Lambeth, where (as Roper knew) the oath was to be

[1] *Works* (1557), p. 628.

demanded from More, More sat silent a while, and at last suddenly whispered, 'Son Roper, I thank our Lord the field is won.'

> 'What he meant thereby,' says Roper, 'I then wist not; yet loath to seem ignorant I answered, "Sir, I am thereof very glad".'

These are their last recorded words. For here Roper drops out of the story, and it is Roper's wife who by word and by letter comforted her father during the fifteen months of his imprisonment, and who, with him, watched from his window his fellow-sufferers, Father Reynolds and the Charterhouse monks, going to execution 'as cheerfully as bridegrooms to their marriages'.

There is something very admirable in the rectitude of memory by which Roper, writing perhaps as much as twenty years after More's death, and more than ten years after the death of Margaret Roper, never claims for himself a share in the peculiar intimacy of More and his daughter Margaret, never forgets the distinction between 'Son Roper' and 'Meg'. This honesty entitles us to believe in the real truth of Roper's dialogues, even where the actual wording must often be his own reconstruction.

We have, then, four main characters—More and his wife, Roper and his wife—acting upon each other. Behind them we have the background of the world, the flesh, and Henry VIII. The world: represented by the Duke of Norfolk, warning the obstinate More, 'By God's body, *Indignatio principis mors est*', and receiving the disconcerting reply, 'Then, in good faith, there is no more difference between your grace and me, but that I shall die to-day and you to-morrow.' The flesh: Queen Anne Boleyn, More's bitterest enemy; More in prison asks how she is faring, and is told, 'Never better':

> 'Never better, Meg,' quoth he; 'alas, Meg, alas, it pitieth me to remember into what misery, poor soul, she shall shortly come.'

King Henry: shown not in proper person, but in the reflected light which these anecdotes throw on *him*. We have only one glimpse of Henry himself as he walks after dinner in the garden at Chelsea, holding his arm about More's neck. And even so, the point lies in More's comment afterwards: 'Son Roper, I may tell thee, I have no cause to be proud thereof, for if my head could win him a castle in France, it should not fail to go.'

Amongst the proofs of More's sanctity, his biographers did not forget to place his peculiar gift of prophecy.

Roper probably wrote, as gentlemen wrote in Tudor days, intending his notes to be merely passed round in manuscript among friends; and,

in fact, it was not till nearly a century after More's death that Roper's life was printed. In Mary's reign the task of writing the formal life of More was given by Roper himself, together with his notes, to a young friend, Nicholas Harpsfield. This life clearly *was* intended for the printer; it is as much a manifesto as, later, was Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* on the other side. But the death of Mary stopped its printing, and the first edition [1] from a collation of the eight known manuscripts is now being prepared for the Early English Text Society by Dr. Hitchcock; this collation is very necessary, since the Harleian MS., the one which has hitherto been used by More's biographers, is so corrupt as to be often quite unintelligible.

Harpsfield has not deserved to be so neglected. He was a scholar —the first Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford—and an enthusiast; he had already suffered exile for his faith during the reign of Edward VI, and was to suffer sixteen years' imprisonment under Elizabeth before he died in the Tower in 1575. He is the writer of the first formal biography in the English language. Cavendish's *Life of Wolsey* may have been written a few months earlier; but that, like Roper's *Life of More*, is nothing but the personal memoir of a man with a genius for narrative. Harpsfield is the first to compile a complete biography in English: he ransacks More's writings for autobiographical fragments similar to those which I have just quoted; he translates and incorporates the description of More which he found in the Letters of Erasmus,[2] or the account of More's trial which was circulated at the time on the Continent. Most of his material is still extant elsewhere, so that it is rather as a literary document than as a historical source that Harpsfield's *Life* interests us. Yet Harpsfield has his own contributions to make to the Saga. I will quote two of these, for the further light they throw on facts which Roper mentions.

Roper tells us that, after More's resignation of the Chancellorship, the bishops and abbots of England, knowing him to be no rich man, collected a great sum as a recompense for his writings in defence of the Church, and that More would not take a penny. How great More's poverty then was, we learn from Harpsfield:

> He . . . was enforced and compelled, for lack of other fuel, every

[1] A copy of the Lambeth MS. was made by the late Mr. Thomas Garner, and is now in the possession of Dom Bede Camm. From it was printed the text (nearly complete) in *Manhu* (vol. ii, no. 4, to vol. vi, no. 58), the monthly magazine of the Chapel of the *Adoration Réparatrice*, Chelsea. From it will be printed the text for the *Orchard Book Series*, now in preparation by Dom Roger Hudleston. A transcript was also made by Mr. Macirone, some extracts from which have been printed by Mr. Reginald Hine in *The Cream of Curiosity*, 1920.

[2] Letter to Hutten (*Opus Epistolarum*, ed. Allen, 999, iv, p. 13, &c.).

night before he went to bed to cause a great burden of fern to be brought into his own chamber, and with the blaze thereof to warm himself, his wife, and his children, and so without any other fires to go to their beds.[1]

We can imagine Mistress Alice More, shivering over the embers of a fire of Chelsea bracken, and reflecting that her husband had refused a sum which would have placed them all in luxury. She was a shrewd mistress of a house, 'spareful and given to profit',[2] and she was having to keep house on nothing.

The other story is startling. William Roper, Harpsfield tells us, about the time of his marriage to Margaret, had reduced himself by immoderate prayer and fasting to such a state of mind, that he thought there could be no truth but that which came out of Germany.[3] So he became a Lutheran. He must have been an awkward inmate of More's house, for in addition to other absurdities, 'of all the world he did, during that time, most abhor' Sir Thomas More. After much vain dispute, More abandoned argument, and took to prayer. Prayer proved effective. But all this throws a new light upon Roper's statement that, in the sixteen years he lived with More, he had never known him 'in a fume'.

In Elizabeth's reign More's memory was cherished among the recusants who, luckier than Harpsfield, escaped to the Low Countries, and in the course of the next generation much new material was collected by Thomas Stapleton. Stapleton's information came from John Clement and his wife, both former inmates of More's house, from John Heywood, the writer of Interludes, from Judge Rastell, More's nephew and the editor of his collected works, and above all from More's secretary, John Harris, and his wife Dorothy. Dorothy Harris, as Dorothy Colly, had been maid to Margaret Roper. It was she who, after her husband's death, handed over to Stapleton all the papers about More.

Fuller tells us that those of his own persuasion observed that Thomas Stapleton was born in the same year and month wherein Sir Thomas More was beheaded, 'as if divine providence had purposely dropped from heaven an acorn in place of the oak that was felled'. Anyway, Stapleton took up More's work of controversy with the Protestants, in Latin and English, with such success that many wondered that

[1] *Emmanuel MS.*, fol. 39 a.

[2] Harpsfield, *Emmanuel MS.*, fol. 25 b, following Erasmus, *acrem ac vigilantem matrem familias*, Letter to Hutten, ed. Allen, as above, p. 19.

[3] *Emmanuel MS.*, fol. 23 b.

Allen, and not he, was chosen for the Cardinal's cap. But such consider not, says Fuller, that Stapleton's ability was drowned with Allen's activity, one grain of the statesman being too heavy for a pound of the student, practical policy, in all ages, beating pen pains out of distance in the race of preferment.[1]

Stapleton's forty years' labour has been strangely neglected by his countrymen, and this neglect extends to his Latin Life of More. This most important life was printed in Douay, Paris, Cologne, Frankfort, Leipzig, Graz, and in more recent times has been published in French and Spanish translations: it has never been either printed in England or translated into English.

To some extent, this neglect has been made good by the later sagamen, who have used the material supplied them by Stapleton. At least three such composite English biographies existed. One is lost, except for an odd leaf preserved in the Bodleian.[2] The second, which was written by a certain Ro. Ba. about 1599, is extant in at least six MSS.[3] This life gives the More-saga in its most complete form: it is a careful combination of the Roper-Harpsfield tradition with the tradition of the refugees as preserved by Stapleton. But the writer is more than a mere translator and compiler. Let any one compare in the two versions the story of the Winchester man who spoke with More, as More passed on his way to execution. The story in Stapleton's Latin is a noble and touching one. But in the Tudor English of the *Life* of 1599 it becomes one of the great stories of the world:

> Afterwards, as he passed, there came to him a citizen of Winchester, who had been once[4] with Sir Thomas before, and it was upon this occasion.
>
> This poor man was grievously vexed with very vehement and grievous tentations of desperation, and could never be rid of it, either by counsel or prayer of his own or of his friends. At last a good friend of his brought him to Sir Thomas, being then Chancellor. Who, taking compassion of the poor man's misery, gave him the best counsel and advice he could. But it would not serve. Then fell he to his prayers for him, earnestly beseeching Almighty God to rid the poor man of his troubles of mind. He obtained it; for, after that, the Hampshire man was never troubled with it any more, so long as he would come to Sir Thomas More; but after he was imprisoned and could have no access unto him, his tentation began again more vehement and troublesome than it was before.

[1] Fuller's *Worthies* (1811), ii. 398 (Sussex).

[2] MS. Rawl. D., 923, fol. 261.

[3] The Lambeth MS. was printed in Wordsworth's *Ecclesiastical Biography*, vol. ii.

[4] So Harleian and Lambeth. Sloane reads 'ofte'.

So he spent his days with a heavy heart, and without all hope of remedy.

But when he heard that Sir Thomas More was condemned, he posted from Winchester, hoping at least to see him as he should go to execution, and so determined to speak with him, come what would of it. And for that cause he placed himself in the way. And at his coming by, he thrust through the throng, and with a loud voice said, 'Mr. More, do you know me? I pray you for our Lord sake, help me: I am as ill troubled as ever I was.' Sir Thomas answered, 'I remember thee full well. Go thy ways in peace, and pray for me: and I will not fail to pray for thee.'

And from that time after, so long as he lived, he was never troubled with that manner of tentation.[1]

The third of these composite lives was compiled by More's great-grandson, Cresacre More. But Henry VIII had confiscated all the family papers—'seized all our evidences', as Cresacre puts it—so that there was little to add to what Roper and Stapleton had recorded in an earlier age.

Stapleton and Cresacre More, unlike the matter-of-fact Roper, sometimes tell stories which have an air of miracle. Sometimes the story is pathetic. On the day of More's death, Margaret Roper went from shrine to shrine, praying and distributing alms for the good of her father's soul. When she came to the Tower to bury his body, there was no money for a shroud. So her maid, Dorothy Colly, 'went to the next draper's shop and, agreeing upon the price, made as though she would look for some money in her purse, and then try whether they would trust her or no. And she found in her purse the same

[1] MS. *Harleian*, 1302. In Stapleton (ed. 1612, p. 223) the passage runs:

Civis quidam Vintoniensis, gravissima desperationis tentatione longo tempore ita afflictus et agitatus fuit, nullis ut consiliis precibusve aut suis aut suorum eam excutere potuerit. Deducitur tandem per amicum in colloquium Thomae Mori etsi tunc in summa dignitate constituti; qui casum hominis acerbum miseratus, primum bonis et sanis consiliis egit; quae quum non proficerent, precibus apud Deum impetravit ut a dira illa tentatione liberaretur. Mansit civis ille ab omni huiusmodi perturbatione immunis quam diu Moro libere agente, liber ad eum accessus patuit. Ubi vero in carcerem conjectus Morus fuit, tentatio ad hominem rediit, eaque solito vehementior. Miser ille civis quam diu Morus in vinculis tenebatur, extra omnem remedii spem tristes agebat dies. Ubi autem intellexerat mortis sententiam contra Morum latam, Londinum accurrit, ut ad supplicium prodeuntem quocunque tandem suo periculo alloquatur. E carcere igitur ad patibuli locum Moro exeunti occurrit hic civis per satellites irrumpens et alta voce exclamans: An me, inquit, Domine More, recognoscis? Adjuva me quaeso. Nam tentatio illa ad me recurrit, nec ea carere possum. Cui statim Morus: Optime te, inquit, recognosco. Sed vade et ora pro me: atque ego pro te sedulo orabo. Abiit homo ille, nec in tota vita amplius tentationem huiusmodi expertus fuit.

sum for which they agreed.' Dorothy Colly believed, and assured Stapleton during their common exile at Douay, that the money could only have come there by a miracle.[1]

Sometimes the story has a touch of humour which would have pleased More. John Heywood left to his sons, Jasper and Ellis, one of More's teeth. Each son desired to have it for himself. The tooth, suddenly 'to the admiration of both, parted in two'.[2]

But this tinge of wonder is always slight; and so with Cresacre More the Saga ends, less vigorous than in its earlier stages, but still a faithful picture.

THE MYTH

When we turn to the historians of the last two centuries, we find a view of More which cannot be reconciled with these early lives. This modern view is formulated by Burnet in his *History of the Reformation*; More, when he wrote *Utopia*, had 'emancipated himself, and had got into a scheme of free thoughts'; later he 'entirely changed', and became the tool of 'the blind and enraged fury of the priests'.[3] And, equally, to our later historian of the Reformation, Principal Lindsay, More is one who 'turned his back on the ennobling enthusiasms of his youth'.[4] And, despite the sympathetic labours of James Gairdner, despite the defence which Father Bridgett put up against the attacks of Froude, it is Froude's view of More (minus the adjectives) that has been generally accepted by English historians. To Bishop Creighton, More is 'a typical instance of that pseudo-liberalism, so common at all times, which obscures and confuses every question which it touches'; More 'deceived himself with the belief that he was saving society by putting his principles aside'.[5] So, too, the tireless organizer of English biography whose loss we deplore, Sir Sidney Lee, finds in More's career a riddle which it is not easy to solve:

> That the man who, by an airy effort of the imagination, devised the new and revolutionary ideal of *Utopia*, should end his days on the scaffold as a martyr to ancient beliefs which shackled man's intellect and denied freedom to man's thought, is one of history's perplexing ironies.[6]

[1] Stapleton, *Tres Thomae*, Douay (1588), p. 346; Cologne (1612), p. 358.
[2] Cresacre More, *Life*, 1726, p. 304.
[3] Burnet, *History of the Reformation*, iii. ed. Pocock (1865), p. 99.
[4] *History of the Reformation* (1908), ii. 337.
[5] *Persecution and Tolerance* (*Hulsean Lectures*) (1895), pp. 107-8.
[6] *Great Englishmen of the Sixteenth Century* (1904), p. 61.

The *Dictionary of National Biography*[1] tells, in more than one place, the story of More's 'enormities'. The *Encyclopædia Britannica*[2] thinks it doubtful if he can be acquitted of the charge of 'torturing children for heresy'. Melancholy antitheses concerning the 'genial philosopher' transformed into the 'merciless bigot'[3] who 'fed the stake with heretics', 'destroyed the unhappy protestants', and 'persecuted others in defence of superstitions he had himself exposed',[4] have been repeated till they have become a dogma. Even Mr. Trevelyan, in his shrewdly sympathetic history of England, tells us that More 'persecuted Protestantism, dreading toleration anywhere nearer to Europe than Utopia'.[5]

But to the old biographers the life of Sir Thomas More is all of one piece, from the early years which he spent under the monastic discipline of the Charterhouse till, after a lifetime of austerities and devotions, he followed the Charterhouse fathers to death. These early biographers do not apologize for the 'scheme of free thoughts' of *Utopia*; Stapleton recommends the book for attentive study, Harpsfield calls it 'this jolly invention of Sir Thomas More'.[6]

Neither Roper nor Harpsfield says anything of More persecuting heretics, whilst Stapleton[7] and Cresacre More,[8] who wrote after these charges had been formulated, deny them strongly. Cresacre More is too late for the denial to carry any weight, but Stapleton was in touch with More's closest friends, who must have known. Is it the case, then, that the old biographers suppress half the truth, and give only one side of the complex story: the inner life of an Inquisitor; the table talk of a terrorist; Lenin stroking his cat?

I submit that the old biographers are demonstrably right. The saga is historical. But, if that be so, then the view supported by modern historians can only be a myth.

[1] See Bainham, Frith, More.

[2] Eleventh edition, xviii. 825.

[3] Froude, *History* (1856), i. 344–5, ii. 227.

[4] Horace Walpole, *Anecdotes of Painting* (1888), i. 70.

[5] *History of England* (1926), p. 300. So H. A. L. Fisher (*History of England, 1485–1547*, pp. 226, 355), Preserved Smith (*Life of Erasmus*, p. 91), Innes (*England under the Tudors*, pp. 88, 93), Lord Acton (*Academy*, ix, 610), Paul Van Dyke (*Renascence Portraits*, 201–3), G. Dudok (*Sir Thomas More*, chap. vii), and very many others assert More's 'change', though generally in kindly language. But it is not only the historians: see, for example, Jowett, *Dialogues of Plato* (1875), iii. 189.

[6] *Emmanuel MS.*, fol. 27 b. Stapleton (1588, p. 46; 1612, p. 186) says of *Utopia, nihil circa praecepta vitae ac morum gravius, solidius, prudentius.*

[7] Ed. Douay (1588), p. 42; ed. Cologne (1612), p. 182.

[8] Ed. 1726, p. 197.

The charge of persecution turns on a passage in More's *Apology*, where More is said to admit that he had twice flogged for heresy. Accordingly, his denial of further 'enormities' is dismissed as mere forgetfulness: 'he under-estimated his activity'.[1] Now More's *Apology* has never been printed since 1557: an edition is in preparation for the Early English Text Society, but meantime More has too often been condemned unheard. What More admits is this. He accepted into his household a child from a heretical home. He once ordered this child to be flogged—not for holding heretical dogmas, but for teaching them to another child in the house. The households of great men filled in Tudor days some of the functions of a public school. Now, even if More had been the philosophic agnostic which some people think the author of *Utopia* ought to have been, yet, in fairness to the orthodox parents who had trusted their children to him, he could not have allowed these children to be taught an illegal doctrine, the holding of which might have made them liable to the death penalty when they grew up.

The second case is more serious; in a passage, twice reprinted in the nineteenth century, More tells, with what reads like callous brutality, how he caused a heretic, admittedly half-witted, to be flogged. But the appearance of brutality is due to the fact that the passage has been twice bowdlerized in the interests of propriety. More flogged the man, not for holding heretical views, but for making indecent attacks upon women, in church, at the time of the Elevation. I will venture to restore the expurgated passage:

> And if he spied any woman kneeling at a form, if her head hung anything low in her meditations, then would he steal behind her, and, if he were not letted, would labour to lift up all her clothes and cast them quite over her head.[2]

More, 'being advertized of these pageants', at the request of 'very devout religious folk' intervened, and had a sound thrashing administered, making sure that the man had enough wits to know why he was being flogged. Nowadays, the culprit might have been sent to prison, or perhaps for life to an asylum. More's rough and ready method was effective, and more merciful. 'God be thanked,' he writes later, 'I hear none harm of him now.'

Yet three eminent writers[3] have quoted this case as proving that

[1] Sidney Lee in *Dict. Nat. Biog.* xxxviii. 436; endorsed by A. F. Pollard, *Henry VIII*, p. 194 (footnote).

[2] *The Apology* (1533), cap. xxxvi; *Works* (1557), p. 901.

[3] A. F. Pollard and Sidney Lee as above; Mark Pattison in *Encyc. Brit.* (Eleventh ed., xviii. 825).

heretics were 'persecuted', 'beaten into orthodoxy' and punished 'for religious opinion' by More.

Which proves that, when we expurgate, we should always insert asterisks.

Though he was not flogged for heresy, the culprit was indisputably a heretic, and was indisputably flogged against a tree outside More's garden. But there were also trees inside the garden (one is asserted to be still standing in Chelsea to-day). Why should not those trees have been used for flogging heretics? So the story grew:

> . . . so farforth that one Segar, a bookseller of Cambridge, which was in mine house about four or five days, and never had either bodily harm done him, or foul word spoken him while he was in mine house, hath reported since, as I hear say, to divers, that he was bounden to a tree in my garden, and thereto too piteously beaten, and yet beside that bounden about the head with a cord and wrungen, that he fell down dead in a swoon.
>
> And this tale of his beating did Tyndale tell to an old acquaintance of his own, and to a good lover of mine, with one piece farther yet, that while the man was in beating, I spied a little purse of his hanging at his doublet, wherein the poor man had (as he said) five mark, and that caught I quickly to me, and pulled it from his doublet, and put it in my bosom, and that Segar never saw it after. And therein I trow he said true, for no more did I neither, nor before neither. Nor, I trow, no more did Segar himself neither, in good faith.[1]
>
> And of all that ever came in my hand for heresy, as help me God, saving, as I said, the sure keeping of them, (and yet not so sure neither, but that George Constantine could steal away) else had never any of them any stripe or stroke given them, so much as a fillip on the forehead.[2]

Now we cannot get round this denial by suggesting that More is mistaken: that 'it is clear that he under-estimated his activity'. The charge is that, as Chancellor, More tortured illegally luckless heretics who were in his keeping for a few days before being given into the custody of the bishop. More, writing a few months after his resignation, says that he gave them 'not so much as a fillip on the forehead'. Either he is speaking the truth, or he is telling a peculiarly deliberate and peculiarly cowardly lie. Dean Swift calls More the person 'of the greatest virtue this kingdom ever produced',[3] and Dean Swift did not give testimonials recklessly: when our *Dictionary of National Biography* asserts that this most virtuous Englishman who ever lived was a liar, Englishmen are entitled to ask for the evidence. What is the evidence?

[1] *The Apology* (1533), cap. xxxvi; *Works* (1557), p. 902.

[2] The same, p. 901.

[3] *Works* (ed. Temple Scott), iii. 301.

There are two petitions, extant in the Record Office, which accuse More of illegal imprisonment. Froude treats these charges as true.[1] Froude cannot have known that, in the *Apology*, More deals with this very question, mentioning by name one of the petitioners, Philips, and telling how the king ordered a scrutiny, and how the accusation had to be dismissed as frivolous.

More challenged his traducers to produce the evidence at a time when he was in retirement and poverty. If he really *had* instructed his officers to inflict illegal torture and imprisonment, he was in no position to have closed their mouths. What Roper says in another connexion is indisputable—if there had been 'any just quarrel against him, it would without doubt in this troublous time of the king's indignation towards him have been deeply laid to his charge, and of the king's highness most favourably accepted'.

Yet all the efforts of More's foes procured no such evidence of illegal floggings and torturings. But the story of Segar the bookseller was not forgotten, though it got attached to other names. A generation later, when the tales of the Protestant martyrs were collected, More was charged with having abused his power as Chancellor against four heretics, Tewkesbury, Frith, Petit and Bainham. We know the dates when these atrocities must have occurred, if they did occur, *and in three cases they do not fall within More's chancellorship*. The fourth case is possible, chronologically; but it rests on the same basis of irresponsible gossip as the others, and falls with them.

But I must leave the fuller consideration of these charges to another place, where there may be room to quote and examine them in detail.

It may be said that, granting these tales of illegal 'enormities' to be untrue, More might have instigated persecution, without going outside the existing law. But the play of *Sir Thomas More* gives the London tradition concerning him. London was unlikely to have forgiven or forgotten a persecutor: the bishop of London, Fitzjames, described his diocese as maliciously set in favour of heresy.[2] Yet the old play idolizes More, and gives no hint of anything in his life needing apology, except that he, 'a very learned worthy gentleman, seals error with his blood'. And Erasmus states that, whilst More was Chancellor, no one suffered death for heresy in England.[3] This is not true: Erasmus was not in a position to know exactly what was

[1] *History*, ii (1856), pp. 76–83.

[2] *The enquirie and verdite of the quest panell of the death of Richard Hune.*

[3] *Epist. ib. xxxi* (Lond. 1642), col. 1505.

going on, especially in the provincial dioceses of England; but he knew More too well to make it likely that he could have said this, if More really had been a persecutor. Since More lived in the London diocese, a persecution encouraged by him would have been particularly felt in London. And Froude tells us that 'no sooner had the seals changed hands [from Wolsey to More] than the Smithfield fires recommenced . . . encouraged by the Chancellor'.[1] But, thanks largely to the pious care of Foxe, we have details of the burnings for heresy in London. Froude's statement is not true: it is, in fact, only a reminiscence of a rather different statement of Burnet, that, whereas Wolsey was no great persecutor of heretics, More, as soon as he came into favour, pressed the king much to put the laws against heretics in execution.[2] What *is* true is that, as More rose in favour, he became a leader against the heretics. It was in 1519 that he surrendered his office of Under-Sheriff in the City and gave all his time to the king's service. The king was then 'making it his study how to extirpate Luther's heresy': and More was soon helping the king to revise his book against Luther; later, More stepped in, and took the whole controversy off the king's shoulders (1523). Then we find More associated with Wolsey in trying to stop the importation of Lutheran books[3] (1526). Then More's close friend Tunstall, bishop of London, handed over to him the task of refuting all heretical books (1528). Then More was made Chancellor (1529), and certainly remained 'in favour' till February, 1531, when the trouble came, over the king being made 'supreme head of the Church'.

All this time, More's exertions against the heretics must have given him special opportunities of encouraging 'the Smithfield fires'. *But in all these twelve troubled years there was* (*so far as our very ample information goes*) *not one death sentence pronounced on a heretic in the diocese of London.*

The Smithfield fires recommenced only after the date when an unwilling clergy had conferred on the king the title of Supreme Head (February, 1531). And from that date More, though still in office, was no longer in power. Chapuys writes that More is so distressed that he is anxious above all things to resign his office.[4] More's friend, Tunstall, had become bishop of Durham, and had been succeeded as bishop of London by Stokesley. Stokesley was not personally un-

[1] *History* (1856), ii. 83.

[2] Ed. Pocock, i. 262.

[3] Leaflet addressed *Den wirdigen . . . heren Burgemeysteren und Rait Mannen der Stat Coelln.* (Brit. Mus. C. 18. e. 1 (94)).

[4] *Letters and Papers of Henry VIII*, v. 112 (21 Feb. 1531).

friendly to More, but he was the principal promoter of the measures which were making office intolerable to him.[1] Yet More could not resign without seeming to censure the king; and it was another fifteen months before failing health justified him in retiring.[2]

During the last six months of More's chancellorship three [3] heretics *were* burnt at Smithfield. We know from More's words that in some cases, at least, he had been present at the trial, as had many other officials, clerical and lay.[4] But Stokesley was responsible. More refers to these three cases in the *Apology*: he writes as a layman defending *the clergy* from the charge of administering the law harshly, and he argues that the sufferers had a fair trial according to the laws of the realm.[5] More's words, written about a year after these trials, seem quite incompatible with the assumption that he (or any layman) was held responsible. Foxe, writing thirty years later (1563), makes More largely responsible. But the official documents, which Foxe quotes at length, do not bear this out. Foxe, however, also quotes a dying speech of one of the martyrs (Bainham) blaming More for his death. This speech, if authentic, would be evidence. But Foxe omitted it from later editions, presumably because he no longer believed it authentic. Modern editors have reinserted it.

For two years More was in retirement, writing against heretics of various kinds, Tyndale, Frith, and Barnes. During this time Stokesley handed over to the secular arm, for capital punishment, two heretics, one of whom was Frith. The chronological error has already been noticed by which Foxe makes More, as Chancellor, arrest and ill-use Frith. Frith's examination before Stokesley makes it clear that Frith did not even land in England till after More had surrendered the seals.

Then Stokesley, in May, 1535, sentenced either thirteen or fourteen anabaptists. His colleague in this severity was More's antagonist, the Lutheran Barnes. More had nothing to do with it: he had been in prison over a year, and a few weeks later he followed the heroic and nameless anabaptists to death.

To recapitulate: during the dozen years when More was increas-

[1] *L. & P.*, v. 62 (23 Jan. 1531).

[2] Harpsfield makes it clear that this was no mere pretext, *Emmanuel MS.*, fol. 16 b. Compare *D. Erasmi Epistolarum Opus*, Basileae, 1558, p. 1073.

[3] If the *Grey Friars' Chronicle* (*Monum. Franc.* ii. 194) is to be interpreted that two others were burnt *with* Bainham, this would make five. But neither Foxe nor More knows of more than three in all, within this period.

[4] *Works* (1557), p. 348. [5] Ibid., p. 889.

ingly in power and favour, there were no death sentences for heresy pronounced in his diocese; during the few months when he was still in office, but certainly neither in power nor favour, there were three; during the three years of his retirement, disgrace, and imprisonment there were fifteen or sixteen. During these last three years Lord Audeley held the seals: and he was supposed to be friendly to the Reformers.[1] The figures do not suggest that the London persecution had anything to do with the Chancellor; they suggest that it depended upon Stokesley replacing Tunstall as bishop. The bishops who, willingly or unwillingly, were separating the Church of England from the Church of Rome, persecuted heretics in order to persuade themselves and others that they were orthodox. So did the king.

Those who have given currency to the myth of More's 'enormities' have shown that they possess neither the humanity of Judge Jeffreys (who ruled that hearsay evidence is no evidence) nor the legal acumen of Mr. Weller senior (who understood the value of an alleybi).

THE THEORIES OF UTOPIA, AND THE PRACTICE OF SIR THOMAS MORE

But, whilst denying indignantly the cruelties attributed to him, More 'wills all the world to wit on the other side' that he believes that it is necessary to prohibit 'the sowing of seditious heresies', and to punish, in extreme cases with death, those who defy such prohibition.[2]

There is sternness, some would say harshness, in all More's writings about heretics. Such sternness naturally seems the reverse of Utopian, to those who take 'Utopia' in the current sense of an easy-going paradise, too happy and ideal to be realized.

But what are really the principles of Utopia, as to toleration and other things?

More does not make the Utopians Christians. And from this, modern scholars have argued that, when he wrote *Utopia*, he thought the vague Deism of his Utopians more ideal than 'the popular religious beliefs of his time'.[3] And such an inference might be not altogether unreasonable, if we were dealing with an Englishman educated in the eighteenth or nineteenth century. More's critics often forget that his education fell in the fifteenth century. And it

[1] 'Hall's' *Chronicle*, p. 828.

[2] See especially *Apology*, *Works*, p. 926; *Dialogue*, *Works*, pp. 274–88.

[3] Cf. Jowett, *Dialogues of Plato* (1875), iii. 189.

was part of the medieval system to isolate the virtues which might be taught by human reason alone from the further virtues taught by Catholic orthodoxy. So the Seven Virtues were divided into the Four Cardinal and the Three Christian Virtues. That Utopia is based upon the Four Cardinal Virtues of Prudence, Fortitude, Temperance, and Justice, would be clear, even without the accompanying letter of Busleiden. And these four heathen virtues were sufficient to ensure that a man or a state might be a model of conduct in secular matters. Virgil in the *Divine Comedy* represents Philosophy, Reason, Human Wisdom: and he rescues Dante from the dark wood and guides him till he meets Beatrice. For Virgil is one of those who

> le tre sante
> virtù non si vestiro, e senza vizio
> conobber l'altre e seguir tutte e quante.

For the pattern of a state, Dante turns to Heathen Rome, or else to Heathen Greece:

> Atene e Lacedemone, che fenno
> l'antiche leggi e furon sì civili.

So in *Piers Plowman*: *Do Well* is the virtue of secular life, and examples of it are the great non-Christian philosophers and rulers, Aristotle, Solomon, Socrates, Trajan; *Do Better* and *Do Best* represent forms of Christian virtue. So, naturally, More is interested in the problem which for half a lifetime tormented Dante and Langland: what will be the fate, in the next world, of the just heathen, who are our example in the affairs of this world? More's answer is tentative, but he quotes with approval the 'comfortable saying' of Master Nicolas de Lyra, the Franciscan, Dante's younger contemporary. Nicolas de Lyra argued that, though a much fuller faith is demanded from Christians, it suffices for the heathen to have believed 'that God is; and that He is a rewarder of them that seek him'. And More quoted this,[1] not in his 'emancipated' youth, but in his last book, written in the Tower, when he was awaiting martyrdom 'for the faith of the Catholic Church'.

What then is the attitude of Utopia as to these two articles, which represent, in More's view, the orthodoxy to which a heathen may attain? King Utopus tolerated all varieties of belief and disbelief, save on these two points; he forbade, *sancte ac severe*, that any man should disbelieve in either (1) Divine Providence, or (2) a future life in which, as the Utopians believed, the just would be rewarded by God's presence.

[1] *Works*, p. 1287.

So far was this simple creed from appearing lax to More's friends, that the marginal note (written either by Erasmus or by Peter Giles) contrasts the Utopian faith in immortality with the laxity and doubts of many Christians: *Animorum immortalitas, de qua hodie non pauci etiam Christiani dubitant.* But in Utopia, the man who disbelieves either of these articles is not counted as a citizen, or even as a man; he is excluded from all office, and despised, as being necessarily of a base and vile nature. He may not in public (*apud vulgus*) defend his opinion. Then comes the sentence which has been so often quoted, out of its context. In the old translation it runs, 'Howbeit they put him to no punishment.' What More really says is, 'They do not put him to any bodily punishment'—so long, that is, as he loyally submits to the disgrace and to the silence which his heresies involve. The charge of inconsistency against More rests upon refusing to notice his distinction between liberty to hold an opinion, and liberty to preach that opinion; between a man being 'a heretic alone by himself', and being 'a seditious heretic'.

Bishop Creighton, to prove that More in later life 'put his principles aside', quotes the passage which tells how King Utopus, when settling the Utopian constitution, found many religions prevalent in the land, and ordained that they should all be tolerated. Creighton then omits the passage about Utopus disgracing and muzzling those who held the opinions he thought pernicious. But this passage is vital: for, in the light of it, we find that Utopus did *not* tolerate the preaching of all views, but only of those which he, in his wisdom, thought tolerable. Then Creighton begins to quote again. Even those who held most noxious opinions 'were put to no punishment'. They are put to no further punishment, so long as they will submit to being disfranchised, despised and silenced.

But, as the watchman says to Dogberry, 'How if they will not?'

We can guess what would happen *then*, when we remember that, even in the discussion of such opinions as the State allows, any violent speech is punished in Utopia by banishment or bondage. And, in Utopia, if a man condemned to bondage jibs at his punishment, he is slain out of hand like a wild beast. Suppose that two sceptics, who did not believe the soul of man to be immortal, had discussed, in private, in Utopia, how they could get the law repealed, which silenced and disfranchised them. They would have incurred the penalty imposed on those who plot against the fundamental laws of Utopia. And, even for the highest magistrates, that penalty is death.

Still, within these narrow limits, the Utopian has liberty of con-

science. He may not spread among the common people a belief which the State thinks harmful, nor may he discuss the most innocent opinions in a way likely to cause sedition and dissension. He may not, in private, discuss any affair of State. But, if he submits to these restrictions, he is left alone: he is not to be terrorized into saying that he believes what he does not believe.

It may be a low ideal of liberty which allows, to a man who holds views disapproved by the authorities, freedom of thought only on condition that he does not claim freedom of speech. But that *is* the liberty Utopia allows. I shall try, later, to show how More stuck to that ideal.

But we merely confuse the issues if we use our modern, question-begging terminology, contrasting More's 'progressive' ideals in *Utopia* with his later 'reactionary' practice.

Utopia is, in part, a protest against the New Statesmanship: against the idea of the non-moral autocratic prince. I do not say that it is an impartial protest. The evil counsellors, who are represented in the First Book of *Utopia* egging the prince to despotism, might have replied that their ideal was not necessarily base or sycophantic. Patriots have seen in it the only force strong enough to save their country; reformers have seen in it the only force strong enough to carry through the reformation they desired. But *Utopia* is hostile to it. More's refusal to see anything but evil in the new political idea is closely parallel to his refusal to see anything but evil in the new religious ideas, when, later, these spread from Germany to England.

Again, *Utopia* is, in part, a protest against the New Economics: the enclosures of the great landowners, breaking down old law and custom. Here again, we must not suppose that *Utopia* gives us the full story. There was much more in the problem of enclosures than the greed of the great landlord, *dira pestis patriae*. The humble but up-to-date farmer was also in favour of sweeping away all traces of the older communal husbandry:

> Where all things in common do rest,
> Yet what doth it stand ye in stead?

Now, in contrast to this changing world, More depicts a state, where 'all things in common do rest', and where there is no place for the grabbing super-man. More's theoretical *Utopia*, looking back to Plato's *Republic* and to corporate life in the Middle Ages, probably seemed to some contemporaries the reverse of 'progressive'. Cardinal

Pole has told of a conversation he had in his youth with Thomas Cromwell. Cromwell ridiculed the *Republic* of Plato, which, after so many centuries, had led to nothing. *He* had a book on statesmanship in manuscript, by a practical modern writer, based on experience. The book, which Cromwell offered to lend to Pole, was *The Prince* of Nicholas Machiavel.[1]

It is noteworthy that the two most potent books on the State written in the sixteenth century were written within so few years of each other. Parts of *Utopia* read like a commentary on parts of *The Prince*, as *Rasselas* reads like a commentary on *Candide*, though we know that in neither case can the English writer have read his continental predecessor. There is a reason for the coincidence; before *The Prince* was written, ideas used in *The Prince* had been gaining ground. They were the 'progressive' ideas: and we may regard *Utopia* as a 'reaction' against them.[2] Over and over again, in Book I of *Utopia*, Raphael Hythlodaye imagines himself as counselling a prince, telling him what he ought to do, against those who are telling him what he *can* do; and always Raphael admits that these ideas of justice which he has brought from Utopia are opposed to all that the most up-to-date statesmen of Europe are thinking and doing.

So clearly did More feel that he was out of touch with his age, that it is strange that he ever allowed himself to be drawn into practical politics. He knew his danger. Perhaps Mistress Alice More had something to do with his decision:

> She all to-rated him, and asked him, 'What will you do, that you list not to put forth yourself, as other folk do? Will you sit still by the fire, and make goslings in the ashes with a stick, as

[1] Se librum scriptum habere hominis moderni quidem, sed ingeniosissimi et acutissimi, qui non sua somnia est persecutus ut ea, quae Plato scribit de Civitate sua (quae post tot saecula locum inter homines non invenit) sed ea, quae quotidiana rerum experientia comprobat, ac vera esse ostendit. . . . *Epistolarum Reginaldi Poli Pars I*, Brescia, 1744. *Ad Carolum V, Caesarem*, 135–7. It has been argued that Pole misinterpreted Cromwell's intentions, and that Cromwell really meant to lend him the *Courtier* of Castiglione. I am not convinced by the argument, for which see Van Dyke, *Renascence Portraits*, 401.

[2] I had written this before reading Hermann Oncken's lecture on the *Utopia* (1922), but I am glad to find I have the support of his authority: More's view, 'ist den Anschauungen Machiavells über König und Untertan, Staatszweck und Staatsgewalt, Macht und Recht unzweideutig entgegengesetzt. Im Jahre 1516 lag der 'Principe' des Italianers handschriftlich bereits vor. Morus kann ihn aber nicht gekannt haben. Hätte er ihn gekannt, so würde man aus diesen Sätzen herauslesen können, dass sie gegen niemand anders als den Italianer gerichtet sein sollten . . . *Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie, Phil.-Hist. Klasse* (1922), 2, p. 12.

children do? By God, go forward with the first, for as my mother was wont to say, God have mercy on her soul, "it is ever better to rule than to be ruled".'[1]

The problem is discussed in the First Book of *Utopia*. Hythlodaye gives his reasons for not entering the service of the state; Grecian as he is, he appeals to Plato's dictum that the just man, engaging in politics, would be unable single-handed to resist the ferocity of all, and would perish without being able to help either the State, his friends, or himself.[2] More replies by putting the case for compromise: it is a wise man's duty, if he cannot turn a thing to good, at least so to order it that it be not very bad.

It was sixteen years after writing this, that More gave up the struggle, and surrendered the seals.

After that, Thomas Cromwell came to see him. Here is Roper's account of More's words:

> When they had thoroughly communed together, 'Master Cromwell,' quoth he, 'you are now entered into the service of a most noble, wise and liberal prince: if you will follow my poor advice, you shall, in your counsel-giving unto his grace, ever tell him what he ought to do, but never what he is able to do . . . For if the lion knew his own strength, hard were it for any man to rule him.'

Thomas Cromwell was not likely to take More's advice: as a student of *The Prince* he knew that 'the man who leaves what *is* done, for what ought to be done, learns sooner his ruin than his preservation'.[3] So Cromwell swept on, to become 'the hammer of the monks', to make the king supreme over his cowed nobles and helpless clergy, to aim at making him, out of the monastic spoils, 'the richest king in Christendom', and even at putting into his head to 'take upon him to have his will and pleasure regarded for a law'.[4] We may think of the interview between More and Cromwell as one where the Utopian faced the Machiavellian, provided we use those words without prejudice—and few words have accumulated more. It was not idealism facing villainy. To a man who believed that only an all-powerful, ruthless king could save England in the troubled days ahead, the advice that the lion should be kept from learning his strength, in order that he might be ruled, may have sounded villainous. But, however we choose to allot praise or blame, the contrast is there.

[1] Harpsfield, *Emmanuel MS.*, fol. 25 b. The story comes from the *Dialogue of Comfort*, *Works*, p. 1224.

[2] *Republic*, Book VI (496).

[3] Cap. xv.

[4] Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, ed. Townsend (1838), vi. 45.

Now, why should it be propounded as 'one of history's perplexing ironies', that 'the man who devised the ideal of *Utopia*' died as an opponent of the revolution carried through by Henry VIII and Thomas Cromwell?

One competent observer did not so regard it. Antonio Bonvisi was a scholar, a wealthy merchant of Lucca, living in London, and for about forty years a friend of More: a little before his condemnation More addresses him, *Amicorum amicissime*. Bonvisi had the foreigner's privilege of standing aloof from English politics, and so could send food and wine to More in prison, and clothes to enable him to go decently to execution. And Bonvisi, says Harpsfield, would often talk of More,

> and also of Sir Thomas Cromwell, with whom he was many years familiarly acquainted, and would report many notable and as yet commonly unknown things, and of their far-squaring, unlike, and dis-agreeable natures, dispositions, sayings and doings, whereof there is now no place to talk.[1]

I sometimes think that Archdeacon Harpsfield deserved his sixteen years in the Tower, for having left untold these anecdotes of Bonvisi, showing the different tempers of those two mighty opposites, Thomas Cromwell and Thomas More.

Cromwell's ideal was *The Prince*; More's ideal was a state ruled by stern law for the good of all, a state closely akin to the monasticism which Cromwell was to destroy. For, if Cromwell had learnt his lessons from the man who has been called 'the parent of the modern state', More had learnt *his* from the medieval religious houses.

For four years More had lived, without vow, the life of a Charterhouse monk, so far as it was possible for a layman, busied with law-studies, to do so. He thought of entering the Franciscan order. Then, unable to face a life of celibacy, he came back into the world. Yet how he kept the ascetic spirit is shown by the story of his devotions and austerities, preserved by Roper and Stapleton. It is a mistake to think of More's ascetic writings as belonging only to the period of his imprisonment. His earliest book, the translation of the *Life of John Picus*, shows his austere outlook, and the *Four Last Things* belongs to his middle life.

But he returned to the world; and the world, as he says in *Utopia*, seemed to him only a conspiracy of the rich to defraud the poor.

[1] Harpsfield, *Emmanuel MS.*, fol. 36 b; *far-squaring* means 'widely-differing': Oberon and Titania *square*, 'differ', in the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, II. i. 30; similarly *dis-agreeable*, 'not able to agree'.

His remedy is to apply the monastic rules of obedience and of poverty. *The religious houses are the one European institution which the Utopians are said to approve.* And with reason, for in Utopia, though the rule of celibacy is necessarily absent, the monastic idea is at work. The Utopian state is as sumptuous as many a religious house was. But the Utopian, like the monk or friar, may possess nothing. Everyone in Utopia must wear the common habit—in a letter to Erasmus, More calls it Franciscan [1]—there are four varieties, for men and women, married and unmarried. 'The cloaks of the Utopians are all of one colour, and that is the natural colour of the wool.' Their hours of work, of recreation, the very games they may play, are all regulated. There are no foolish and pernicious games like dice. Instead, the Utopians have two games, one of which is intended to teach mathematics, and the other to teach morals. The Utopians eat in refectories, beginning every dinner and supper by reading something pertaining to good manners and virtue. Talk at table is initiated and directed by the elders, who graciously encourage the younger married people to join in the discussion, by turning it into a kind of oral examination. As for the men below twenty-two and the girls below eighteen: they serve, or else stand by, in marvellous silence, watching their elders eat and talk.

In much of this, More is perhaps joking; it was his way to utter his jests with such a solemn face as to puzzle his own household.[2] But, underneath More's fun, was a creed as stern as that of Dante, just as, underneath his gold chain, was the shirt of hair. And, quite certainly, the ideal of *Utopia* is discipline, not liberty. It is influenced by some of the most severe disciplines the world has ever known. Through Plato's *Republic* it goes back to the barrack life of a Spartan warrior: through More's own experience and aspirations, to the life of a Charterhouse monk or Franciscan friar. And the discipline of Utopia is enforced rigidly, even ferociously. If the Utopian attempts to break the laws of his native land, there is the penalty of bondage, and behind that of death. Even to speak of state affairs, except at the licensed place and hour, is punishable in Utopia with death, lest permission to discuss politics might lead to revolution. Has any State, at any time, carried terrorism quite so far?

Many framers of ideal commonwealths have shirked the question of compulsion, by imagining their citizens all moral. More does not

[1] *conspicuus paludamento Franciscano: Opus Epistolarum Erasmi*, ed. Allen, ii. 1910, p. 414.

[2] Cresacre More (1726), p. 179; cf. *Works*, p. 127.

choose this easy way. He faces, with his usual honesty, the problem: What is to protect our institutions from evil men? This question must be answered by those who hope for betterment from institutions, not solely from the conversion of the individual.

A great German scholar has distinguished between the two sharply contrasted ideals brought into open conflict as the Middle Ages ended: the Church-ideal, with its visible institutions, and the Sect-ideal, with the emphasis laid upon the individual soul.[1] Now, apart from everything else that we know of More, and of his austere and lifelong orthodoxy, *Utopia* alone should suffice to show us on which side he was likely to find himself, in this quarrel. The Protestant reformer placed his hopes in every man being allowed to study for himself the Word of God: but King Utopus brings about reform by compelling men to submit to 'the laws and institutes of the Island of Utopia'.

It is not always realized how very medieval those laws are.

The medieval immunity of the clergy from secular punishment, for which Becket had fought, had once again been challenged: and whilst More was planning *Utopia*, London was stirred, over a proposal to deprive of this privilege clerks in minor orders. Very characteristically, More sticks to the medieval principle, whilst stripping it of its abuses. Priests in Utopia who commit any offence suffer no temporal punishment; they are left only to God and themselves: 'For they think it not lawful to touch him with man's hand, be he never so vicious, who after so singular a sort was dedicate and consecrate to God, as a holy offering.' But inconveniences do not result to the state, because in Utopia priests are so few, and so carefully chosen: *eximia sanctitate, eoque admodum paucos.* And it has been argued from this limitation that More in *Utopia* shows a 'detestation of priests',[2] incompatible with his later defence of the clergy. But there is no incompatibility. The necessity of selecting priests carefully, and limiting the number, is also urged by More in his writings in defence of the Church a dozen years later.[3]

Although themselves inviolate, the Utopian priests have power to excommunicate, and this power is dreaded, for if the person excommunicated do not quickly repent, the secular arm intervenes and punishes him. Utopia has two religious orders, devoted to good

[1] E. Tröltsch, *Gesammelte Schriften*, i. 371 (*Die Soziallehren der christlichen Kirchen und Gruppen*). See E. F. Jacob, *Nicolas of Cusa* in *Some great thinkers of the Renaissance*, ed. Hearnshaw (1925), p. 33; Bryce, *Holy Roman Empire*, 1912, p. 373.

[2] Jowett, *Dialogues of Plato* (1875), iii. 189.

[3] *Dialogue*, *Works*, p. 228.

works; members of these orders are normally not priests; and here again, this is in conformity with what More advocates later, when defending the Church.[1] One of these orders is celibate, one (like the Franciscan Third Order) permits marriage. The Utopians have magnificent and solemn churches, which, by the counsel of the priests, have been deliberately built so that the light within may be dim and doubtful, 'because they thought that over much light doth disperse men's cogitations'. They have no image of God in their churches, not from antipathy to images as such, but because they do not agree as to His likeness: but they have an elaborate ritual of vestments, candles, frankincense and music, these being things that can offend no one. On the other hand, we hear nothing of any Utopian sacred book.

Utopia is the work of a sacerdotalist, who felt that love of ritual and beauty were natural and reasonable instincts.

Again, from the economic side, the man who depicted so sympathetically the communism of Utopia was bound to distrust the changes of the early sixteenth century. It was observed by our great Utopian of the nineteenth century, William Morris, that More is rather the last of the old than the first of the new. The spirit of association, as it existed in medieval times, was still strong in him, and led him to denounce the 'ugly brutality of the earliest period of commercialism', the revolution which was altering the peasant life of England.[2] Morris was thinking especially of More's denunciation of the grasping landlords, and the enclosure of the open fields. But a Utopian was equally bound to dislike the proposal to make over to a grasping king and to grasping landlords the abbeys, friaries and hospitals.

We may admit that, by the sixteenth century, most of the medieval experiments in corporate life badly needed overhauling and mending. But More had laid it down in *Utopia* that a physician must be foolish, if he can only cure a patient of one disease by giving him another; and that likewise the king, who can amend the life of his subjects only by confiscation, shows that he knows not how to rule freemen. *Utopia* indicates that, whilst he realized the faults of individual friars or monks, More believed their community houses to be on the right lines. In such institutions, as Burke put it later, there was 'a great *power* for the mechanism of politic benevolence, what our workmen call a *purchase*. There were revenues with a public direction; there were men without the possibility of con-

[1] *Dialogue*, *Works*, p. 227.

[2] See the Introduction to the Kelmscott Press edition of Robinson's translation of *Utopia*.

verting the estate into a private fortune. In vain shall a man look for the possibility of making such things when he wants them. The winds blow as they list. These institutions are the products of enthusiasm; they are the instruments of wisdom.' How was the man who wrote *Utopia* 'changing', because he dreaded the prospect of these revenues with a public direction being converted to private fortunes, and to the upkeep of the very things he thought most useless, armaments, great households, and idle serving men?

Medieval collectivism had been wrapped up with medieval religion. The storm that was brewing threatened both. The Guilds prayed for the souls of the dead, and this brought them under the ban of the Reformers. The very existence of the hospitals was threatened by some Reformers, because of their connexion with the Church. 'The more hospitals the worse', said Simon Fish. Surely such words might move a Utopian to wrath. They moved More to fear also. Of all the heretical pamphlets, he had most to dread that of Simon Fish; before More became Chancellor, it had apparently reached the hands of the king, and the king was considering if he should act on it.[1]

Whether the London hospitals were well or ill managed is not the point. Statements made by flatterers, after the king's wish for an excuse for confiscation had become publicly known, are not evidence. The point is, that More and his circle believed that 'the products of enthusiasm' should be made 'the instruments of wisdom'. More outlined this in *Utopia*; his friend and fellow-courtier, Vives, showed more in detail how it might be done. 'Reactionaries' like More and Vives could not see the logic of the argument that, because funds left for the aid of the sick were alleged to be badly administered, therefore they should be taken from the sick and given to the wealthy. The advice of Fish and of Cromwell proved in the end more to Henry's mind. More had not been dead many months when one of the four great London houses for the sick was given to Henry by parliament. It became the dwelling-house of Sir John Williams, Master of the Jewels, and the 'lodgings for the poor' became stables: a grim commentary on what More had said in *Utopia* twenty years before—that the sick and aged poor were cared for no better than beasts of burden, and that the rich were daily seeking, under form of law, to take from them even what they had. Soon the three other hospitals were also laid waste. The inmates sometimes received a pittance for some weeks or months; sometimes they were in mercy allowed to remain in any odd corners of the buildings where they could find shelter,

[1] Foxe, ed. Townsend, iv. 658; cf. *L. & P.*, Henry VIII, iv. 5416.

and were 'supported by the casual alms of the charitable'.[1] But the staff were turned away; each 'late hospital' lay 'vacant and altogether destitute'. So things continued for years, till Henry, 'divine mercy inspiring us,' restored for charitable purposes the site of *one* of the four hospitals, Rahere's great foundation of St. Bartholomew's. But Henry retained the endowments, and as there was equipment for only three or four patients,[2] a mere site was not much use. So Henry resumed possession. But the protests of the City were too strong to be quite ignored, and on his deathbed Henry regranted St. Bartholomew's, and most (not all) of its endowments. So he became the 'Founder'. The vulgarity by which Henry claimed to be the donor of charities he did not destroy has even shocked his admirers; but many years before, in *Utopia*, More had depicted flatterers instilling into a king that he is the gracious donor of whatsoever he does not confiscate. Years of flattery had convinced Henry of this: but why is More said to have 'changed' because in 1529 he opposed what in 1516 he had asserted it to be the plain duty of a councillor to oppose?

Ten years elapsed between the date when Henry began the sack of the London hospitals, and the date when he re-endowed St. Bartholomew's.

The city, later, recovered St. Thomas's from Edward VI; the two other hospitals were for ever destroyed. Yet one of these, St. Mary's outside Bishopsgate, had a much larger revenue than either St. Bartholomew's or St. Thomas's; at the Dissolution 'there were found 180 beds, well furnished, for receipt of the poor; for it was an Hospital of great relief'.[3]

Now every modern reader is struck by the picture of the four great hospitals which stand outside the chief town of Utopia, Amaurot. But in this, as in other details (to some of which the marginal notes of *Utopia* call attention), More is merely giving a glorified picture of 'the flower of cities all', that most beautiful (if most unsanitary) London which he loved. The proposal to destroy the spacious churches, halls, and hospitals which were the honour of his town, moved him to indignant protest against the railing rhetoric of Simon Fish:

> But now to the poor beggars: what remedy findeth their proctor [Simon Fish] for them? To make hospitals? Nay, ware of that! Thereof he will none in no wise. For thereof, he saith, the more the worse, because they be profitable to priests. What remedy then? Give them any money? Nay, Nay, not a groat. What other thing then? Nothing in the world will serve but this: that

[1] Norman Moore, *History of St. Bartholomew's Hospital*, ii, p. 126.
[2] Ibid., p. 153.
[3] Stow, *Survay* (1603), p. 168.

> if the king's grace will build a sure hospital, that never shall fail to relieve all the sick beggars for ever, let him give nothing to them, but look what the clergy hath, and take all that from them. Is not here a goodly mischief for a remedy? Is not this a royal feast, to leave these beggars meatless, and then send more to dinner to them? Oh! the wise![1]

This is no caricature. Fish contemplates no re-endowment; he does really suggest the confiscation of all the property of the Church, and apparently the abolition of the clergy themselves, as the one remedy for social evils. But, in Utopia, a citizen who had privately suggested such things to his prince as Fish suggested to Henry would have been put to death. Why, then, wonder at More's indignation?

When it was too late, More's indignation was echoed by English writers of every party: and the most vocal of all were the extreme Reformers themselves. Latimer has too many associates in his 'protest against the Protestant tyranny'[2] for their evidence to remain for ever ignored. The difference between More and the Reformers is this: More protested beforehand against the policy of 'leaving beggars meatless, and then sending more to dinner to them'; the Reformers bewailed the results of that policy. One of them rejoices 'for the Faith's sake' that the Abbeys have been taken from the 'Imps of Antichrist', but he admits that '*it had been more profitable for the Commonwealth that they had remained still in their hands*'.[3] The monasteries, another Reformer groans, at least 'kept hospitality, let out their farms at a reasonable price, nourished schools, brought up youth in good letters'; but the laity who have got the monastic lands 'do none of all these things'.[4] 'The state of England was never so miserable, as it is at this present.' The same complaint, that schools had been ruined, and charitable provision for the poor made away, was bluntly stated by a preacher before Edward VI and his Council.[5] More had gone so far as to say that the oppression with which Christian people were threatened by the spread of these new ideas was worse than the tyranny of the Turks.[6] It was left for an extreme Reformer to tell how a merchant, returning home after many years abroad, was surprised to see the old almshouse gorgeously rebuilt, till he was undeceived by a beggar, who explained that the inmates had been turned out to die in corners, and that men of great riches now owned the house:

[1] *Works*, pp. 301, 302.
[2] W. P. Ker in Craik's *English Prose*, i. 226.
[3] Brinklow, *Roderick Mors*, ed. Cowper, E. E. T. S. (1874), pp. 9, 32, &c.
[4] Becon, *Jewel of Joy* (1553), H ii, verso.
[5] Lever, *Sermons*, ed. Arber, 81.
[6] *Works*, p. 275.

Lord God, quoth this merchant,
In Turkey have I been,
Yet among those heathen
None such cruelty have I seen.[1]

Mr. R. H. Tawney puts it that 'the classes whose backing was needed to make the Reformation a political success had sold their support on terms which made it inevitable that it should be a social disaster'.[2] More saw the bargain being made, though he did not live to see its fruits. He watched the court of Henry VIII with that uncanny insight which enabled him to make forecasts such as Roper has recorded. He must have realized exactly what was threatened, when Fish's *Supplication of Beggars* was passed from one greedy courtier to another; from Rochford to Anne Boleyn and from Anne to Henry himself. At the very time that More was publishing his reply to Simon Fish, foreign observers were struck with the open way in which the great lords were planning to take the property of the Church.[3] Where the modern economic historian speaks of 'social disaster', More, in his picturesque Tudor English, calls it 'a devilish desire of noyance both to poor and rich; priest, religious and layman; prince, lord and people; as well quick as dead'.[4]

To describe the 'progressive' author of *Utopia* as having 'changed into a reactionary', because he did not wish to tread 'the path of progress' exactly as Henry and Thomas Cromwell were planning to tread it, seems unreasonable, whether we think of the religious houses and their beautiful ritual, or of social problems and the rise of capitalism. From the political point of view there was not more ground for sympathy. The essence of Henry's revolution was to sweep aside one of the two sets of rulers, ecclesiastical and civil, who, in theory, had governed Christendom. One medieval ideal, which Marco Lombardo explained to Dante in the Third Circle of Purgatory, had been that the temporal and spiritual powers should guide and check each other.[5] And we have seen that this dual control seemed so much a matter of

[1] Crowley, *Selected Works*, ed. Cowper, E. E. T. S. (1872), pp. 11, 12.

[2] *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (1926), p. 142.

[3] *L. & P.* Henry VIII, iv. 6011. Du Bellay writes to Montmorency (Oct. 17, 1529): 'La fantaisie de ces Seigneurs est que luy [Wolsey] mort ou ruiné, ils defferent incontinent icy l'estat de l'Eglise, et prendront tous leurs biens . . .' Le Grand, *Histoire du Divorce*, iii. 374 (1688).

[4] *Works*, p. 290.

[5] Soleva Roma, che il buon mondo feo,
due soli aver, che l'una e l'altra strada
facean vedere, e del mondo e di Deo. . . .
Purgatorio, xvi. 106–8.

course to More when he wrote *Utopia* that, although the Utopians are heathen, they reflect the medieval theory, with the two parallel authorities, civil magistrates and priests. But Henry's revolution left the king supreme. So it was natural that a Reformer like Tyndale should write, 'The king is, in this world, without law, and may at his lust do right or wrong, and shall give account but to God only.' It was equally natural that Henry should say of Tyndale's book, 'This book is for me, and all kings, to read.'[1] And it was equally natural that the deviser of *Utopia* should disapprove of Tyndale and his book, seeing that in Utopia the prince is hedged in by laws which it means deposition for him to break, and may be excommunicated by priests whom he cannot touch.

Now all these things which have been mentioned are not among the beliefs which a Utopian may accept or reject at will. The solemn dark churches, with their elaborate ritual of music, vestments, candles, and frankincense, are part of that state religion which remains, when everything has been removed which can offend any particular sect. So, too, the dual authority, ecclesiastical and civil, the limited power of the prince, and the inviolability of the priest, are not tenets of any sect, but part of the fundamental constitution of Utopia.

More's critics have not realized how many of the things in defence of which he, at the end of his life, stepped forward, had already seemed to him so vital when he wrote *Utopia*, that he made them part of that greatest common measure of all religions which is the official creed of Utopia.

What is remarkable, then, about the religion of *Utopia* is not the extent to which it differs from the practice of the medieval church, but the extent to which it coincides with it. There *are* differences, and they follow, inevitably, from the postulate that Utopia is a 'philosophical city' grounded upon reason alone: the Utopians, ignorant of revelation, naturally have views on worship, asceticism, suicide, and divorce which differ from those of the orthodox in the Middle Ages. To cite these things, as Jowett does,[2] as proof that More was 'far from sharing the popular religious beliefs of his time', is to miss More's point, as well as to ignore what More's biographers tell us of his life. As a warning against this very mistake More, after describing the view of asceticism held by the Utopians, adds that they believe this to be the truest that man's *reason* can find, *unless any godlier be inspired into man from Heaven.* Then, to make it still clearer, we find

[1] Strype, *Ecclesiastical Memorials* (1822), I. i. 172.

[2] Jowett, *The Dialogues of Plato* (1875), iii. 189.

a marginal note, 'Annotandum et hoc diligenter'.[1] And 'the verses in the Utopian tongue', added apparently by Peter Giles, with a Latin translation, emphasize this point:

> Civitatem philosophicam expressi mortalibus;
> Libenter impartio mea, non gravatim accipio meliora.

More is sketching a system of what Francis Bacon, in the *Advancement of Learning*, calls Natural Theology ('that rudiment of knowledge concerning God obtained by a contemplation of his creatures') as against Divine Learning, which is 'grounded on the word and oracle of God'. Bacon has little interest in Natural Theology: it suffices to disprove Atheism, but beyond that he will not go. In *Utopia* More goes a great deal further: ritual, symbolism, and sacerdotalism have their place in the Natural Religion of Utopia.

A Protestant Reformer, trying to evangelize Utopia, would have objected to the solemn churches. These pope-holy works, he would have said, by their darkness prevent us from reading the Word of God.[2] He would have called 'the curiosity of their dainty singing' nothing but 'a mockery with God'.[3] The tapers offered in these dark churches, for purposes of ritual, would have drawn from the Reformer the scoff which irritated More—'Does God need candle-light?' A Reformer would have seen only an out-of-date abuse in the inviolability of the Utopian priests; and still more in their vestments, in the varied colours of which they asserted that various divine mysteries, of which the priests held the key, were symbolized. Could a thoroughgoing Reformer have abstained from assailing such 'conjuring garments'?[4] He would have ascribed to the Devil[5] the miracles which the Utopians asserted to happen often, and which they 'highly esteemed'. But, had he spoken thus *acerbe*, thus *petulantius*, our Protestant Reformer would have been deported from Utopia, or else condemned to bondage, with the threat of death if he were still recalcitrant.

Utopia tolerates those who worship Sun or Moon; but if a man declares any recognized religion to be profane, impious, and sacrilegious, Utopia does not tolerate *him*: he is punished cruelly. This is very

[1] This note is placed (apparently by Giles or Erasmus) rather earlier in the first two editions. But the edition of 1518 is the one which received More's correction, and its arrangement is authoritative (cf. Erasmus, *Opus Epistolarum*, ed. Allen, 543, vol. ii, p. 494).

[2] Compare *Works of Tyndale, Frith, and Barnes* (1572), p. 279.

[3] Bilney, quoted by Foxe, ed. Townsend, iv, p. 621.

[4] Crowley, quoted in Strype, *Life of Parker* (1821), i. 301.

[5] Cf. More, *Dialogue*, *Works*, p. 286.

much the same view as that which More put forward later, when writing against the heretics: that it 'were peradventure none evil way' to allow Turkish missionaries in Christendom, if the Turk would receive Christian missionaries in Turkey, 'violence taken away by assent on both the sides'; but that this is no reason for tolerating heretics, who *are* violent.[1]

Anyway, Utopia would have tolerated no Reformer in religion, if 'Reformer' implies persistent censure of the unreformed. We must never allow ourselves to forget the kind of arguments More had to meet. One of his antagonists, after bringing every filthy accusation he can think of against all the clergy, demands that they be tied to carts, to be whipped naked about every market town, and then married. Whereby, says More, 'what opinion he hath of wedding ye may soon perceive: for ye see well that if he thought it good he would not wish it them'.[2] Tyndale and many of the other martyrs had used words hardly less violent. Such language, quite apart from any question of the doctrines they are maintaining, places Tyndale and Fish outside the toleration of Utopia. More is simply echoing *Utopia* when he blames the heretics for being raisers-up of dissensions; or again, when, in defence of the severe words he feels bound to use, he says:

> If they [the heretics] will not . . . be heretics alone themself and hold their tongues and be still, but will needs be babbling and corrupt whom they can, let them yet at the leastwise be reasonable heretics, and honest, and write reason and leave railing, and then let the bretheren find the fault with me, if I use them not after that in words as fair and as mild as the matter may suffer and bear.[3]

But, More adds, this way will the heretics never take. 'In railing standeth all their revel.'

More's repeated warnings that the laws of Utopia are not necessarily put forward as worthy of imitation, his insistence that he has undertaken to narrate, not to defend them, is the more important in view of some recent criticisms. There is some indication that a new myth is arising of a Sir Thomas More who (with a Machiavellism more subtle than that of Machiavelli himself) propounded exactly such pretexts for expansion as would be useful to the British Empire of future centuries, and who yet, with characteristic English hypocrisy, pretended to be fighting for morality all the time.

But, when More emphasizes that the Utopians only go to war for certain reasons which concern the welfare of their citizens or of their allies, it is likely that he is wishing to get in a side blow at the

[1] *Works*, pp. 275, 276. [2] Ibid., p. 307. [3] Ibid., p. 866.

state of Europe in 1516, and to censure wars waged at the whim of, and for the personal aggrandizement of, autocrats. I admit that the causes of warfare approved by the Utopians, if made into a code, and applied to history from the seventeenth century to the present day, would load the dice heavily in favour of the British Empire; for they are adapted to a great colonizing island state, such as Utopia is supposed to be, and such as Britain later became. But could More have foreseen this?

One German historian [1] has recently suggested that More, when he makes the Utopians claim the right as a populous nation to colonize empty spaces, may even have been thinking of English settlements in North America. Another [2] argues that these theories of the natural right of colonization are no part of the original *Utopia*, with which they seem to him to harmonize ill, but are an addition made in 1516. And, bold as these assumptions may seem, it must be admitted that they have received confirmation by a new fact which has been brought out by Dr. Reed. Whilst More was finally revising *Utopia* in 1516, his brother-in-law, John Rastell, was planning an expedition to the New Found Lands, and More's father seems to have been deeply concerned in the venture.[3] Six months after the *Utopia* was issued, this expedition had started.

But, though possibly enough More had this voyage to the New Found Lands in mind when describing the colonies of Utopia, there is nothing very sinister about More's patriotism. The Utopians only settle where there is 'much waste and unoccupied ground', and they admit to full citizenship any of the natives who care to join them. When More was planning *Utopia*, the Italians were the great navigators, and Spain and Portugal were the great colonizing powers. Even France was ahead of England in the New World; indeed, for an Englishman like John Rastell to plan such an ambitious expedition was as rare as it proved unsuccessful. More's words cannot be twisted into a plea for a monopoly of colonial rights for England: if he is staking out a claim at all, it is for the common body of Christendom.

And indeed, *Utopia* is essentially a work of our common Western European civilization. This civilization had seldom seemed more inter-dependent than at the moment when the Reformation and the rise of nationalism were to split it apart. The Latin text of *Utopia*

[1] Hermann Oncken in *Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie, Phil.-Hist. Klasse*, 1922.

[2] Ernst Tröltsch, *Christian Thought, its history and application*, London (1923), p. 145, &c.

[3] A. W. Reed, *Early Tudor Drama* (1926), pp. 12, 14.

was published in Louvain (1516), Paris (1517), Basle (1518), Cologne, Hanover, Amsterdam, before being published in England; translations were published in German (1524), Italian (1548), and French (1550) before, in 1551, the English translation appeared.

More was a good Englishman, and a loyal subject of Henry VIII, but he was also a good European. This brings us to yet another reason why the man who wrote *Utopia* was little likely to approve of Henry's nationalist revolution.

The ecclesiastical power which Henry swept away had been common to Western Europe: once it was shattered, a number of independent states were left, with nothing to hold together, even in theory, 'the common body of Christendom'. It is of this common body that More is always thinking. Walking with Roper by the Thames-side at Chelsea, he burst out, 'Now would to our Lord, Son Roper, upon condition that three things were well established in Christendom, I were put in a sack and here presently cast into the Thames.' The three things were peace between Christian princes; freedom from heresy in the Church; and a good conclusion to the question of the king's marriage, which otherwise would be a disturbance to a great part of Christendom.

Like Fisher, More could never forget that Islam had won from Christendom Asia, Africa, nearly half Europe, and was still advancing. From the age of Bede to the fifteenth century, Europe had held its own. Now, once more, it seemed to be retiring. The heretics who would rend Christendom asunder at the moment when the Turk was at the gates of Vienna are, in More's view, traitors to the common cause. Almost equally so are the Christian kings, who are censured in *Utopia* because they think of nothing but war among themselves.

More's stern view as to the right of the State to forbid seditious utterance long prevented him from speaking publicly about Henry's revolution. It was not that he was afraid. But he held that had he publicly opposed the government, he would have been guilty of sedition, and so would have brought his blood upon his own head.[1] When, despite this silence, he was found guilty, he held that he was free to speak. He then said:

> You have no authority, without the consent of Christendom, to make a law or act of Parliament contrary to the common body of Christendom.[2]

[1] *Works*, p. 1454. See also below, pp. 222–3.

[2] From the News-letter sent to Paris: confirmed independently by Roper. There are eight manuscripts of the News-letter in the National Library at Paris: the best text is that of *MS. franç.*, 2981.

From *Utopia* to the scaffold, More stands for the common cause, as against the private commodity of the single man, or even the single kingdom. He will not accept the new statesmanship which regards the nations as totally independent, 'gladiators in the European arena'.

Yet it is not enough merely to think of More as one who struggled to keep down the barriers rising to divide Christendom, and as the advocate of the poor against a growing commercialism, and as a humane lover of animals and men. It is easy, by selection, to make a picture of More, as of St. Francis of Assisi, which is but a half-truth. What seemed to More the most terrible thing in the clamour for the plunder of church endowments was that it involved, not only social injustice, but the cessation of prayer for the dead: 'that any Christian man could, for very pity, have founden in his heart to seek and study the means, whereby a Christian man should think it labour lost, to pray for all Christian souls'.[1] The average man to-day feels that a dissolution of the monasteries should have safeguarded all the monastic libraries; should have made arrangements for the carrying on of the philanthropic and educational work, much of which was so brutally interrupted; should have left standing for public use, as places of preaching and assembly, all those great London churches, the want of which was bitterly felt when the nobles had turned them into storehouses for herrings and wine. We all regret the destruction of historical monuments: 'spoiled, broken and ruinated, to the offence of all noble and gentle hearts', as the proclamation of the second year of Queen Elizabeth put it. But if all these things had been safeguarded, More would still have disapproved of a wholesale dissolution. He believed in the religious houses as places of prayer, and of prayer for the souls of the dead. None have ever felt more earnestly that the noble living and the noble dead are branches of one society. This characteristic of More struck Erasmus: *Cum amicis sic fabulatur de vita futuri seculi, ut agnoscas illum ex animo loqui, neque sine optima spe.*[2] This is the meaning of More's words on the way to the scaffold, when he assured the Winchester man who had been sustained by his prayer, that there need be no fear lest such prayer was now about to cease. And it receives confirmation from More's words on Tower Hill. It may be that More saw the Winchester man still lingering, like another sorely tempted man, at another time, 'to see the end'; what friends More saw from the scaffold we do not know. But what he said to them we *do* know. He asked the bystanders to pray for him in this

[1] *Works*, p. 290.

[2] *Opus Epistolarum*, ed. Allen, iv. (1922), p. 21.

world, and he would pray for them *elsewhere*. He then begged them earnestly to pray for the King, that it might please God to give him good counsel, calling them to witness that he died the King's good and loyal servant, but God's first, suffering death in and for the faith of the holy Catholic Church.

The last phrase we have from Roper; the rest, from the news-letter which reached Paris a few days after More's execution. Foreigners who knew English customs were surprised that, instead of the usual speech from the scaffold, More said only this.[1] We know the reason, though they did not. Roper tells how the king had sent Mr. Pope to warn More, 'at your execution you shall not use many words'. It is perhaps better so: had the speech been longer we should have been dependent upon the selective memory of the hearers. As it is, we have the two sentences in which More flashed out the justification of his life and death. As far as I know, no historian and no biographer —not even Father Bridgett—has given these sentences quite fully.[2] But surely they go to the root of the matter.

The King's good and loyal servant, but God's first. These words are among the most haughty ever spoken on the scaffold. Dante could not have bettered them. They contrast with the usual speech from the scaffold in Tudor times. The words of Thomas Cromwell, 'I have offended my Prince', are more normal; the victim usually admits the supremacy of the State which is demanding his head. But when More began his life at Court, Henry told him to look first unto God, and after God unto the King. 'Such conventional counsel', says Sir Sidney Lee, 'was in complete accord with More's working views of life.' But the point is, that to More it was *not* conventional: he took the king at his word, and, when the trouble arose, reminded him (in vain) of his pledge.[3] More had repeatedly touched on this subject in *Utopia*: is the State supreme, or is there a moral law, above the law which the State makes? The Utopians placed the rights of the State very high; it might forbid propaganda and impose silence; nevertheless they recognized that there was a power above the State: the man *cui nullus ultra leges metus* might not be a citizen of Utopia.

The other fundamental clause of the Utopian creed bears a similar relation to the other sentence spoken by More on the scaffold. No one who did not believe the soul of man to be immortal might be a

[1] P. M., *Expositio fidelis* (1535), p. 12.

[2] They are, however, given in *L. & P.*, Henry VIII, viii. 996; *State Papers, Spanish*, 1534–5, p. 510.

[3] *Works*, pp. 1426 (numbered 1427), 1453; Roper.

citizen of Utopia; and there followed a corollary from this. The Utopians

> suppose the dead to be present among them when they talk of them, though to the dull and feeble eyesight of mortal men they be invisible. For it were an unconvenient thing, that the blessed should not be at liberty to go whither they would. And it were a point of great unkindness in them, to have utterly cast away the desire of visiting and seeing their friends. . . . Therefore the Utopians go more courageously to their business, as having a trust and affiance in such overseers.

It may be objected that the parallel is imperfect: that the Utopian belief is only a primitive, animistic creed, whilst More's request to his friends, *to pray for him in this world, and he would pray for them elsewhere*, reflects the orthodox medieval faith:

> Se di là sempre ben per noi si dice,
> di qua che dire e far per lor si puote
> da quei ch' hanno al voler buona radice?

It is this kind of contrast which makes his critics say, that to pass hastily from the speculation of *Utopia* to the record of More's life is to 'experience a strange shock'. But the man of the Middle Ages did not always feel incompatibility where the modern critic feels it. We may 'experience a strange shock' when the horrors of the *Inferno* open with Charon ferrying sinners over Acheron, to the judgement of Minos. Then the suicide Cato ushers us into the milder shades of the *Purgatorio*, and among the first stories we see sculptured on the sides of the mountain is the example of the heathen Trajan: both things strictly parallel to the selection of the heathen Utopia, as a pattern of political justice. Then the *Paradiso* opens with a hymn to Apollo, and in the heaven of Justice we meet with Trajan and Rhipeus. Dante means much the same as More; and he 'gives a hint of some enormous natural religion behind all history, and, from the first, foreshadowing the Faith'.

MORE'S PLACE AMONG ENGLISH THINKERS: SOME COMPARISONS

I do not wish to exaggerate: and I know of no one who has failed to see the charm of More's life, or the heroism of his death. But the historians do seem to me to have denied the consistency underlying that life, and that death. They have honoured More as a hero, but censured him as a thinker. Creighton's verdict stands: More's

thinking is 'pseudo-liberalism which obscures and confuses every question which it touches'; and More himself is 'the official engaged in justifying what was convenient for the moment, deceiving himself with the belief that he was saving society by putting his principles aside'. It is true that, amid these melancholy sermons on the 'lost leader' which have been peculiarly insistent during the past thirty years, I must note one outstanding exception. Dr. A. W. Reed has maintained the consistency of Sir Thomas More.[1] But Dr. Reed is the exception who proves my rule. He teaches, not history, but English Language and Literature.

So, if the historians have no use for Sir Thomas More, except as a terrible example of tergiversation, let them hand him over to us. We need him. To the student of the English language he is a vital link between Middle and Modern English. To the student of English thought he is equally vital: he points back to William Langland, and forward to Edmund Burke. All three, Langland, More, and Burke, have been the victims of much the same kind of misunderstanding. All three had (what Burke thought the standard of a statesman) 'a disposition to preserve, and an ability to improve, taken together'. All three are therefore apt to be misunderstood, especially by those who think that the two things cannot be taken together. More and Burke have been libelled, and Langland, where his thought is deepest, has been accused of hopeless wandering without a definite plan.

Now, one great value of the *Lives* of Sir Thomas More lies in their helping us to understand More and his writings: and More and his writings help us to see a continuity running through English literature. The late Sir Walter Raleigh said, 'Nothing is more striking than the way English people do not alter.' However that may be, Langland, More and Burke deal with somewhat similar problems in a way which does not much alter.

More makes a link between two ages. We think of him, and rightly, as our first great modern; as the first great English vernacular historian; or as the first and greatest of an illustrious line of writers of Utopias; or as the greatest member of our first group of modern scholars, a man skilled in calling bad names in good Latin; and Dr. Reed has just shown us how we have to look to him and his circle for the beginnings of the Tudor drama. But More was also the last great man who lived the whole of his life with the England of the Middle Ages yet undestroyed around him: a land of great libraries which had been accumulating since Anglo-Saxon times; of ancient religious houses where the walls were covered with paintings, and the

[1] *Some great thinkers of the Renaissance*, ed. Hearnshaw (1925), p. 139.

windows shone with the glorious English glass of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; a land of schools more plentiful than ever they were again till almost our own day. More is a product of those late Middle Ages of which Dante is the supreme figure: he is the consistent opponent of the new ideas which found literary expression in *The Prince*, and were embodied in the person of Thomas Cromwell.

I have been trying to show how the description of the Utopian state, with its communism, its sacerdotalism, its love of beauty and of symbolic ritual, remains in touch with the Middle Ages. And the First Book of *Utopia* points back to the medieval ideal of a common Christendom; it is this ideal which makes More hate war among Christian princes, just as it made Langland speak of Edward's French wars as contrary to conscience. This ideal of a united Christendom made Chaucer, who had himself fought in those French wars, pass over as unworthy of record the achievements of his perfect gentle knight in France, whilst he enumerated that knight's rather desultory crusades. And in Chaucer's day the ideal was still strong enough to carry the chivalry of France to Nicopolis, to perish in 'the most pitiful and most shameful ruin of the best knighthood of Christendom'.

The charges of inconsistency against More arise from our ignoring all this; from our forgetting that his life falls in this last age of English medieval Catholicism, and from our reading back, into his earlier writings, the experience, and even the propaganda, of later generations. Burnet or Froude[1] feel that *When More wrote the* Utopia, *he was in advance of his time. None could see the rogue's face under the cowl clearer than he.* It is just because More *is* medieval that he can 'see the rogue's face under the cowl' without thereby attacking monasticism as an institution. Froude could not: so he calls More a bigot. We might as well think that Fra Angelico was anti-clerical, because, among the group which he depicted as being carried off to Hell from the Last Judgement, we can see the tonsured head, the cardinal's hat, and the bishop's mitre.

A comparison of *Utopia* with the *New Atlantis* may put More's book into its right perspective. It is an odd coincidence, and a helpful one, that our two greatest Lord Chancellors, at an interval of a little more than a century, should each have drawn an imaginary commonwealth.

The simplicity of *Utopia* belongs to an age when voluntary poverty was still an ideal, and an ideal sometimes practised. It was an ideal which More always had before him; there is a good deal of the spirit of St. Francis in his satisfaction, when he finds himself a quite penniless

[1] *History*, ii. 344.

prisoner, dependent for his food upon the charity of that great lady, Mistress Alice: 'Me thinketh God maketh me a wanton, and setteth me on his lap, and dandleth me.' So it is natural that the Prince and the Bishop in Utopia are dressed with the same simplicity as their subjects, distinguished only by a little sheaf, or taper of wax, carried before them. But in the *New Atlantis*, a Professor from the College wears gloves set with precious stones, and shoes of peach-coloured velvet: and (what would have shocked More yet further), our Professor has fifty attendants, 'young men all, in white satin loose coats up to the mid-leg, and stockings of white silk, and shoes of blue velvet, and hats of blue velvet, with fine plumes of divers colours set round like hatbands'. The austerity of the attire of the citizens of Utopia is set off by the ritualistic pomp of the priests' vestments during worship. But we hear nothing of any such Church ritual in the *New Atlantis*.

On the other hand, whilst More does not make his Utopians Christian, and does not give them any sacred book, Bacon invents an outrageous piece of 'miraculous evangelism,' in order to ensure that the *New Atlantis* shall have the canonical books of the Old and New Testament, wrapped in sindons of linen, floated over the ocean in a small ark of cedar wood. It is not that More neglected his Bible: his devotional works contain long passages of translation from the Gospels which should have given him high rank among English Bible-translators. Nevertheless, the library which Hythlodaye took with him to Utopia consisted of Greek works of literature and science. Hythlodaye and his companions instruct the Utopians in Greek; and also in the mysteries of the Christian religion; but we hear nothing of any evangelical literature, as yet, in Utopia. Whilst More was writing *Utopia*, the Greek New Testament of Erasmus had appeared: here was a chance for More to have brought 'his darling' into his book, as he has brought his other friends. Yet he does not take the opening. The immediate problem of the Utopian converts, as it appears to More, is not how the text of the Gospels can be got out to them, but how a priest is to be found to minister the sacraments.

In secular affairs the contrast of Bacon and More is equally marked: Bacon trusts, for the relief of man's estate, to the growth of science; More looks to a more equal distribution of wealth.

Now in England 'Progress' for many centuries moved, not in accordance with the Catholic, medieval, collectivist hopes of More, but along the path indicated by Bacon, the Protestant man of science. And that path *has* led to the 'relief of man's estate'.

Nevertheless, all that had been hoped had not been accomplished, and so the nineteenth century saw a revolt, of which the Oxford Movement and *News from Nowhere* were but different manifestations. Now it was just because of this return to medievalism that *Utopia* made a strong appeal to the nineteenth century, and still makes its appeal. The solemn churches of Utopia move us, while the evangelical miracle of the *New Atlantis* only excites our scepticism. The voluntary poverty of Utopia appeals to what we feel to be our need. But the wealth lavished upon the Research Professor by the naïve inhabitants of the New Atlantis is bound to cause searchings of heart in the breast of any moderately modest professor; and it can be guaranteed to rouse ribald laughter if read to his class. We look back on the *New Atlantis* as a great landmark we have left behind: *Utopia* is still before us.

And so we call *Utopia* 'progressive.' And then we wonder that More resisted 'the progressive movement of his time', forgetting that the charm of *Utopia* lies exactly in the fact that it championed the things, all trace of which 'the progressive movement of his time', in its haste for change, was sweeping away. Is it not because we are ourselves too inconsistent to appreciate his consistency, that we blame Sir Thomas More? Like those persons wearing green spectacles of whom Hooker speaks, we think that which we see is green, when indeed that is green whereby we see.

Certain combinations of qualities may seem to some of us, on a priori grounds, inconsistent. But when we find such men as Langland, More and Burke agreeing together in this combination, it should lead us to ask whether our a priori judgement is well grounded.

Langland, More and Burke are alike in their hatred of oppression and corruption—a hatred which in each case is too fierce to be always just. Yet each, when he finds this hatred leading to violence and revolution, shows marked want of sympathy with the revolutionaries. All three are convinced that a people cannot cut itself off from its past: so that they often seem prepared, in the main, to accept the order of things which has come down to them, only demanding of such order that it be administered honestly. And, first amid this order of things, they rank such a measure of unity, small or great, as the Christendom of their age has been able to inherit. It is this longing for Unity of Holy Church, and passion against the schism which is destroying it, that inspires the great closing section of *Piers Plowman*. It is for the 'common corps of Christendom' that More is always pleading; and for it he died. It is impossible not to be

reminded of More when reading the great passage near the end of the *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, where Burke eulogizes Europe as 'virtually one great state'. Langland's lament over the Church, More's difference with Henry VIII, Burke's quarrel with the Jacobins, are all at bottom one: it is the complaint of the man who longs for unity, against those whom, justly or unjustly, he regards as, in Burke's words, 'making a schism' in the European system.

There is another sentence of Burke which may be a help towards the understanding of Sir Thomas More. When well over sixty,[1] Burke recalled how 'pretty early in his service' he had told the House that 'he had taken his ideas of liberty very low; in order that they should stick to him, and that he might stick to them, to the end of his life'. More had taken his ideas of liberty very low; so low that, one might think, there should have been little difficulty in sticking to them. Yet he stuck to them only at the cost of his life.

Of course, first and foremost, More gave his life, not for liberty at all, but for Unity, 'in and for the Faith of the Holy Catholic Church'. So he said on the scaffold; at his trial he was able to speak more at length, and it was *then* that he put forward the plea of liberty of conscience. It seems to be agreed that thereby he was claiming for himself a liberty which he denied to others: most of the leading historians who have dealt with his trial and death say so. More, says Burnet, had shown the preachers of Luther's doctrine 'no mercy, but the extremity of the law, which himself now felt to be very heavy'.[2] Liberty of conscience, says Froude, was a plea which could be urged with a bad grace for men like More, who, while in power, had fed the stake with heretics.[3] Henry, says Creighton, applied to More 'the same measure of justice as himself had applied to others'.[4] More, says Pollard, protested by his death against a principle which he had practised in life.[5]

Now, as we have seen, More in the *Utopia* depicted the State as laying down what doctrines might be publicly preached, and how they might be preached. To disobey is to be guilty of tumult and sedition. More held that the heretics *were* so guilty. More's consistency was put to the extreme test when he found himself faced with the same problem which the heretics had had to face; when the State

[1] *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*, *Works* (1801), vi. 118.
[2] *History of the Reformation*, ed. Pocock (1865), i. 261.
[3] *History* (1856), ii. 227.
[4] *Persecution and Tolerance* (*Hulsean Lectures*, 1895), p. 109.
[5] *Henry VIII*, p. 333.

decided against the view which he held to be true. More allowed himself to be silenced. He maintained this silence both to his fellow-sufferers[1] and to his enemies.[2] His enemies were puzzled. They could not see why a man who submitted so far should not submit farther. He was even accused of cowardice. More's strictly Utopian attitude comes out at his trial. He is entitled to plead conscience, he asserts, *just because* he has given no occasion of tumult or sedition :

> for I assure you, that I have not, hitherto to this hour, disclosed and opened my conscience and mind to any person living in all the world.[3]

Not long before his own imprisonment, More had enumerated the cases of the only heretics (seven in all) who, so far as he knew, had suffered death in England within recent years, and he had maintained that, under the law, they had had no wrong.[4] Now, thanks chiefly to Foxe, it is easy to control More's judgement in all seven cases. All these martyrs seem to have been devoted and heroic men, and some of them were assuredly saintly men. But they had all used that 'contentious rebuking and inveighing' which More, when he wrote *Utopia*, thought a penal offence. Further, they had all either recanted, and then deliberately broken their oath, or else they had 'given occasion of tumult and sedition': most of them had done both these things. His enemies tried to force More to 'give occasion of tumult and sedition': Cromwell, by saying that he was afraid of death, tried to taunt him into uttering treason. More writes to his daughter :

> I answered, as the truth is, that I have not been a man of such holy living, as I might be bold to offer myself to death, lest God for my presumption might suffer me to fall: and therefore I put not myself forward, but draw back. Howbeit, if God draw me to it himself, then trust I in his great mercy, that he shall not fail to give me grace and strength.[5]

If More had publicly and violently denounced the Act declaring

[1] Cresacre More (1726), p. 241. [2] *Works*, p. 1454, C. E.

[3] Harpsfield, *Emmanuel MS.*, fol. 50 b. Harpsfield is here following the contemporary account of More's trial and death in the News-letter sent to Paris. The French original brings out the point even more clearly than Harpsfield's version : *pourveu que telle conscience, comme est la mienne, n'engendre scandale ou sédition à son Seigneur : vous asseurant que ma conscience ne s'est descouverte à personne vivant.* There is no doubt as to the authenticity of this : the same statement occurs a dozen times in More's letters.

[4] *Works*, p. 890. There were at least five other cases, of which More was ignorant. [5] *Works*, p. 1454.

the king Supreme Head, after it had been made high treason to do so; if he had then been forgiven, upon making his submission to the king, and swearing to oppose him no more; if he had then quite deliberately broken his oath; it might have been said of him, as he says of the heretics, that he had brought his death upon himself.

It is just because More kept his claim for freedom of conscience within the narrow limits which he had himself defined twenty years before, that we can regard him as a consistent martyr for his ideal of freedom. A low ideal, you may say. Anyway, it was too high for More to hold it and live, in the days of Henry VIII.

In the broadest sense, More died because he stood in the path of violence which he was powerless to stop. He opposed a revolution which had behind it Henry VIII, Machiavelli's Prince in action, as Professor A. F. Pollard calls him, and Thomas Cromwell, embodying the new commercialism. Such opposition was, to quote Professor Pollard again, as if one should try to save men's lives from the avalanche, by preaching to the mountain on the text of the Sixth Commandment.

The avalanche destroyed, not only men's lives, but treasures of art which the English nation had been accumulating for eight centuries. Buildings, manuscripts, stained glass, paintings, woodwork, brasses, work of goldsmith and silversmith—all was swept away. 'Marbles which covered the dead were digged up. Inscriptions or epitaphs, especially if they began with an *Orate pro anima*, or concluded *cujus animae propitieter Deus*, for greediness of the brass, or for that they were thought to be Anti-christian, pulled out from the sepulchres.'[1]

We may take the Oxford of More's day, which he loved so well and served so strenuously, as a type of what he wished for England. That Oxford belonged to a Europe still largely medieval, not yet utterly rent asunder by the sense of nationality; an Oxford where Erasmus might share the Greek scholarship which Grocyn and Linacre had brought from Italy. More's Oxford included the things we most admire in the Oxford of to-day: Cardinal College was rising (and, thanks largely to More's intercession,[2] was to continue to rise); to the east Magdalen tower was standing white from the masons' hands. But to the West, where to-day we approach Oxford amid a wilderness of 'gas-holders, coal-heaps, railway sidings, modern tombstones and obscene jerry-buildings,' More saw vast churches, each as big as a cathedral, standing amid their conventual buildings—Oseney Abbey and the Houses of the Black and Grey Friars, a group far surpassing

[1] Weever, *Funeral Monuments*, 1631.

[2] Maxwell Lyte, *History of the University of Oxford* (1886), p. 482.

anything Oxford can show to-day, and of which nothing was spared, except only the Oseney bells.

More wished that England should be the full heir, both of the Middle Ages, and also of the new knowledge: he wished to hold all the positions that had been won, and then to advance all along the line. But he realized that this could only be if matters were conducted, as King Utopus had urged, *cum ratione ac modestia*. More's contemporaries agree in describing *Utopia* as 'a warning against the evils which beset states'. These evils are all forms of self-willed violence: the national ambition which disregards the rights of the rest of Christendom, which is the subject of much of the First Book; commercial greed, 'My Lady Money,' the thought of which underlies the whole of *Utopia*; violence in matters of religion, against which King Utopus legislated, holding that 'as the worst men are the most obstinate, the best and holiest religion would be trodden underfoot and destroyed'.

More's fears came true; everywhere violence prevailed. And so grass is growing to-day on the most sacred spots in England: Glastonbury, Lindisfarne and Whitby are desolate enough to satisfy 'even the most ferocious advocate of impartial religious toleration'.

More did not see why the new knowledge need necessarily destroy the old ideals, whether those ideals were of unity in Christendom, or of the Common Life, or of beauty in building and ritual. More's countrymen have thought differently. Not a generation has passed since More's time, without something of the legacy of the Middle Ages being wasted. Yet 'we are still living on the inheritance, without realizing what the world will be like when all is squandered'.[1]

As we stand amid the mean streets of our towns we may think of the towns of Utopia, where no building was ever mean, most buildings were ancient, all were in perfect repair, and all were for the public service. Then we may remember that, often enough, we may be actually standing on the site of a most beautiful building. In More's day the vast churches of the Friars still stood round about the old towns of England, as Santa Croce, Santa Maria, and San Marco stand round about the old town of Florence to-day. In More's day these English churches were rendering their last public service. Then we may remember that in Utopia no building was ever wantonly destroyed.

The avalanche has passed. But, in *Utopia*, in his English works, and in the strangely neglected *Lives*, we may yet, if we will, listen to Sir Thomas More 'preaching to the Mountain'.

[1] W. R. Lethaby in Crump and Jacob, *The Legacy of the Middle Ages* (1926), p. 90.

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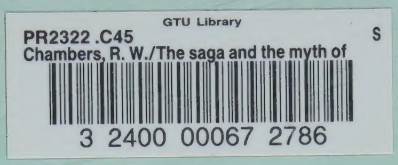

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